



Edited by Sean Guynes and Dan Hassler-Forest

# **STAR WARS** and the History of Transmedia Storytelling

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## Star Wars and the History of Transmedia Storytelling

# Transmedia: Participatory Culture and Media Convergence

The book series Transmedia: Participatory Culture and Media Convergence provides a platform for cutting-edge research in the field of media studies, with a strong focus on the impact of digitization, globalization, and fan culture. The series is dedicated to publishing the highest-quality monographs (and exceptional edited collections) on the developing social, cultural, and economic practices surrounding media convergence and audience participation. The term 'media convergence' relates to the complex ways in which the production, distribution, and consumption of contemporary media are affected by digitization, while 'participatory culture' refers to the changing relationship between media producers and their audiences.

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# “I Am Fluent in over Six Million Forms of Communication”

## A Few Notes on Terminology

Given the notoriously baroque organization of the Star Wars franchise as a film saga, a brand, a licensing franchise, and a transmedia storyworld, establishing a clear and minimally cluttered terminology represents a unique challenge. In order to provide a readable yet precise and consistent way of referencing the many different key Star Wars texts, we have maintained the following editorial guidelines:

- The term “Star Wars” is used (without italics) to refer to the franchise, the brand, and/or the storyworld. To avoid unnecessary clutter, the term has been elided from the (many!) transmedia texts that include it as part of the title, unless otherwise noted. Thus, the TV series *Star Wars Rebels* is referred to simply as *Rebels*, and the original arcade game is cited as *Star Wars*. We have used this strategy with other media franchises as well, such as Star Trek or Harry Potter.
- The numbered saga films, which, at the time of writing, run from Episode I through (the as-yet unproduced and untitled) Episode IX, are referenced using the film’s individual subtitle, broken down chronologically as follows: *A New Hope* (1977), *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980), *Return of the Jedi* (1983), *The Phantom Menace* (1999), *Attack of the Clones* (2002), *Revenge of the Sith* (2005), *The Force Awakens* (2015), and *The Last Jedi* (2017). While we have our reservations about the historical revisionism concerning the first film, which was released as *Star Wars* and retitled *Star Wars: Episode IV – A New Hope* in 1981, these have become the titles with which these installments are most commonly referenced, and ultimately proved to be the least confusing way of indicating the film episodes clearly in spite of this minor inaccuracy.
- The Star Wars Expanded Universe is abbreviated to EU throughout.



## Introduction: “What Is This Strange World We’ve Come to?”

“Excuse me, master Luke, but what is this strange world we’ve come to?” “Beats me, 3PO. Seems like we’ve landed on some sort of ... comedy-variety show planet.” Having just burst through a dressing room wall during the cold open of the February 29, 1980 episode of *The Muppet Show*, the “stars from Star Wars” maintained their in-character performances throughout this unusual episode, performing a comedic narrative that could—in theory, at least—be considered a legitimate part of the Star Wars canon.<sup>1</sup> Watching this episode almost 40 years later, one is struck, first of all, by the fact that both the Muppets and the Star Wars franchise are now owned by The Disney Company—a realization made all the more uncanny when all the characters join in a climactic rendition of “When You Wish Upon a Star” to close down the show. But the episode also illustrates that the means by which Star Wars reached across media to draw upon audiences’ familiarity with the franchise mostly happened in ways that were provisional, self-reflexive, and firmly located within familiar media-industrial practices.

Starting as a film that almost single-handedly transformed the American film industry, expanding into a merchandising and branding juggernaut, and resulting in one of the world’s most profitable entertainment franchises, Star Wars has, over the past 40 years, redefined the popular media landscape. Its multiple transformations make it not only a vivid case study of media-industrial history, but also constitute a unique, widely shared, and constantly evolving storyworld that has developed across every available media platform. Without exaggerating the novelty or uniqueness of a franchise and storyworld that has been so consistently disparaged for its magpie sensibility, the sheer scale and cultural impact of Star Wars clearly sets it apart from its many precursors as well as from its multiple successors. In part, this is again a question of scale: the first film’s blockbuster success in 1977 instantly launched an uncontrolled wave of merchandising and cross-media spin-offs that were incrementally developed into an elaborate storyworld with its own mythology, its own aesthetic, and its own fan culture.

The result of this decades-long negotiation between storytelling, participatory fan culture, and shifting media-industrial practices has been

1 “Shooting Gonzo into the Canon,” *Star Wars Insider* 55, August 7, 2001.

four decades of transmedia storytelling. From disavowed experiments like 1978's infamous *Holiday Special* to the lasting impact of the EU across novels, games, comics, and TV series, the franchise has pioneered ways of expanding storytelling that reach across media boundaries. Therefore, as the current age of media conglomeration and consolidation continues to intensify, Star Wars's transmedia history can help us understand both the opportunities and the tensions that arise when commercial entertainment properties expand across multiple media platforms while engaging with different audiences.

This book approaches the transmedia history of Star Wars as an opportunity to gain new insight from these complex interactions across media. Understanding the franchise not as a unified and cohesive storyworld, but as the product of constantly shifting creative, industrial, and reception practices, the authors in this volume dissect individual moments of crisis, of discovery, and of inspiration that collectively inform the development of transmedia storytelling as a media-industrial practice. In other words, these essays illustrate that "Star Wars" and "transmedia storytelling" must be understood as complex and contradictory terms that are undergoing constant redefinition.

In order to impose some order upon the almost overwhelmingly complicated history of the Star Wars franchise, we have identified four key phases in its history as a transmedia phenomenon. While the chapters in the book are not strictly chronological, as many essays discuss transmedia phenomena that reach beyond the period in which they were first explored, we have organized the volume into three larger sections—a trilogy, if you will—that foreground specific transmedia expansions that typify the media-industrial practices of particular eras. The book's first section brings together essays that are firmly grounded in the period in which the now-classic original trilogy was produced, from 1977 to 1983. In this initial phase, the Star Wars mythology was laboriously created—not just through the films developed in those years, but especially in the many expansions that experimented ambitiously with transmedia storytelling, such as tie-in comics, film novelizations and franchise novels, television films and animated cartoons, a radio adaptation, and developing video game platforms.

The second key phase occurs in the period between the first three films and the prequel trilogy—roughly from the mid-1980s to the late 1990s—as both fans and media industries converge in the development of the EU, incorporating every medium *but* film. The third phase follows from the prequel trilogy (1999-2005) and continues until Disney's purchase of the

Star Wars franchise in 2012. In this period, at the same time that Star Wars faced new branding challenges as a result of the negative reception by older fans of the prequel films and also of George Lucas's edits and re-edits of the original trilogy in the late 1990s and early 2000s, the franchise expanded incrementally across media, intensifying its transmedia world-building strategy through hundreds of novels, comics, games (board, card, computer, video), action figures, animated television series, and licensed adaptive and paratextual materials, such as storybooks, LEGO sets, and museum exhibitions. The second section tackles the second and third phases in Star Wars's history simultaneously, since many of the world-building and franchising strategies that have come to define Star Wars as we know it evolved together across these periods. As the chapters in this section illustrate, the periods between the mid-1980s and 2012 not only solidified the fan culture surrounding the franchise, but also resulted in structured collaborative practices between media licensors, developers, and creative personnel that rendered a complicated landscape of Star Wars media.

The fourth phase and current era begins with the franchise's return to mainstream cultural presence in the Disney era. Chapters in the third section address franchise, fan, licensee, and broader cultural responses to the new strategies and intensified industrial production proffered by Star Wars in the post-2012 age. The three main sections are bookended by interviews with two renowned "aca-fans" who are known for their previous work on world-building and transmedia storytelling: Henry Jenkins provides an introductory reflection on the franchise's past and Will Brooker speculates provocatively about its transmedia future.

As tempting as it has been to dismiss Star Wars as the top-down expression of cultural and economic power, the many chapters in this book illustrate above all that its rich history results neither from some capitalist master plan nor from the creative genius of any one creative figure. While it may seem as though transmedia franchises such as Star Wars have become all-powerful entertainment empires, these analyses of key moments show how precarious, unpredictable, and strangely unstable the Star Wars storyworld has truly been.



# Foreword: “I Have a Bad Feeling About This”

A Conversation about Star Wars and the History of  
Transmedia

*Henry Jenkins and Dan Hassler-Forest*

*Dan Hassler-Forest: You're probably one of the world's best-known Star Trek fans—certainly within academia. Since you have always reflected on popular franchises from the dual perspective of the “aca-fan,” it seems most appropriate to start with a question about your own relationship with Star Wars. What's your own history with this franchise?*

Henry Jenkins: I grew up on *Star Trek*, the original series. It was a formative influence on my identity and my understanding of the world. On the other hand, I was an undergraduate when *A New Hope* first appeared, so I necessarily have a different relationship to it. It took a while for Star Wars to win me over. When I saw the first preview in the movie theaters, I laughed it off the screen. From the highly generic and on-the-nose title to the dorky robots, it seemed to embody everything that I thought was wrong about Hollywood's relationship to science fiction as a genre. It just looked laughably bad. Keep in mind though that that first trailer didn't have John Williams's musical score, so the tone would have felt very different for those of us seeing it for the first time. And keep in mind that it followed trailers for *Logan's Run* and *Damnation Alley*, which were both releasing at the same time. What I really wanted was a new Planet of the Apes movie!

So it took me a while to even go see the movie. By that point, it had started to build up some buzz. And when I saw the film, I fell hard. It totally excited my imagination. It had such a strong sense of fun and adventure; its reliance on the Hero's Journey would have been particularly resonant with me at the time since I was undergoing a period of undergraduate infatuation with the writings of Joseph Campbell.

I've gone out and seen every subsequent film on opening day with my wife. She loves to tell the story of how we first met: she arrived for her first undergraduate film class and saw this undergraduate standing around talking to anyone who would listen about the social significance of Star Wars. She rolled her eyes, and later in that afternoon wrote a letter to her



best friend talking about this “pretentious ass” she’d seen in the class who had embodied everything that she was afraid a film class would be like. Two years later, by the time *The Empire Strikes Back* came out, this “pretentious ass” was hers, and she never ceases to remind me of her first impression.

But the story from my point of view suggests just how deeply I was, at that point, engaging with the mythology around Star Wars. Subsequently, my fandom of Star Wars would wax and wane. I’ll talk about some of the twists and turns along the way, but I think that I, like many fans of my generation, was cranky when Star Wars became too much of a children’s franchise, and engaged when there was material there that works at a more mature level.

*DHF: So as a highly engaged witness to the Star Wars phenomenon as it took shape, how would you place it within the larger framework of science-fiction fandom?*

HJ: In some ways, I see it as a crucial turning point for the kind of media-centered fans, the mostly female fans that I wrote about in *Textual Poachers*. Up until that point, most of fandom had been organized around Star Trek, which had been a defining text for a generation of fans. Suddenly, you were seeing forms of fan expression that were taking shape around Star Trek expanded to incorporate new texts, including Star Wars. We can see this as a move from a fandom centered around individual stories to a multi-media fandom, which would continue to expand across genres, across franchises, to the present day.

So if we think about the texts that defined fandom over time, Star Trek is certainly one of those, Star Wars is another, Harry Potter is another, Buffy the Vampire Slayer is another, maybe Xena—these are the fandoms that represent a profound shift in the way fandom operates. It’s easy to understand, then, why some Star Trek fans saw Star Wars as a threat or competition. Star Trek was seen as true science fiction—science fiction about ideas, about the future, about utopian and dystopian alternatives. Star Wars was seen as space opera, fantasy, bound up with spectacular special effects. But I never understood why you had to pick one over the other. Different tastes, different moments in our lives, but both representing exciting contributions to the larger development of science fiction.

*DHF: Unlike most previous fantastic storyworlds, Star Wars was, in many ways, a transmedia experience from the very start: the comic books, the novelizations, the arcade games, the action figures, the soundtrack albums,*

*and so on. While all the merchandising and transmedia spin-offs clearly contributed to the franchise's phenomenal financial success and its cultural impact, they also made the storyworld appear more childish, more frivolous, and more obviously commercial than other science fiction. But at the same time, its ubiquity helped make it a gateway drug for millions of young fans who felt inspired to look beyond Lucas's space opera and discover a whole universe of fantastic fiction. What is your take on the way Star Wars's commercial success has colored its perception among fans of the genre? Is it less of a "cult text" because of its sheer scale?*

HJ: There's no question that George Lucas was a founding figure in the evolution of modern transmedia storytelling. A lot of this has to do with the deal he cut with Twentieth Century Fox around the production of the film, waiving his normal fees as director in favor of a percentage of the gross from ancillary products. Because the ancillary products became so central to his revenues, they also became central to his interest in the stories. This arrangement created a strong incentive for those pieces—the comics, the toys, the novelizations, and so forth—to be more fully incorporated into the story system of Star Wars.

Such experiences became central to Star Wars's commercial success, and meant the experience of Star Wars extended off the screen and throughout the intervals between the releases of individual films. No other science-fiction property had so totally saturated a generation's media experiences. No previous science-fiction film had gained this kind of blockbuster status. The summer blockbuster had only really been established as a category in Hollywood through the success of *Jaws* (1975) just a couple of years earlier. *Star Trek: The Original Series* barely survived on television, limping along through its three seasons, and only really regained the impact it had on the culture through reruns in syndication. As Star Wars achieves this kind of instant mass success, you could make the argument that science fiction was no longer a marker of subcultural identity, but something that could be a mass phenomenon.

It's hard therefore to talk about anyone who came of age in the 1970s and 1980s for whom Star Wars and subsequent science-fiction franchises weren't a central influence on their lives. We could look toward Harry Potter as a similar mainstream niche success, a seemingly contradictory category, but one that seems earned in both cases. It's a mass success because almost everyone in the culture would have gone to see these films, or read the books in the case of Harry Potter, as they were released; but at the same time, it's also a niche success because there were so many subcultural practices that

grew up around them. So each person's experience of these mass hits would have had slightly different inflections and would have brought them into contact with like-minded communities. Liking Star Wars was no longer enough to gain fan street cred, and various forms of fan involvement could still be seen as being too geeky. There's not just one Star Wars but many "Star Warses," which is why I think the ancillary properties or transmedia extensions become so interesting to study.

*DHF: While the narratively self-contained original trilogy clearly wasn't organized as a form of transmedia storytelling, the popularity of the early toys and video games gave audiences at the time unprecedented ways of engaging with the storyworld outside the actual films. How did this affect the development of fan culture in the early years of the franchise, and how would you describe this constant interaction between immersion (in the films' spectacularly visualized and richly detailed storyworld) and extraction (of toys, games, and other items into audience members' lived experience)?*

HJ: There's a tendency to underestimate how central the toys were to the Star Wars transmedia system. Academics are primed to dismiss toys as simple commodities that are ways of exploiting the markets opened up by individual franchises. In the case of Star Wars, as with many other contemporary media franchises, they play a much larger role. They are evocative objects that shape the imagination in particular ways. They are authoring tools that grant to the purchaser the right to retell and extend the story that they saw on the screen. The action figures suggest that there is more going on than can be captured in an individual movie, and that the background details of a fictional world can be as important as the saga of the central protagonist. Indeed, it hints at a place where any given character's story could be of central interest to us, and so, in that sense, we can see the action figures as paving the way for the kind of stand-alone films that are part of the new Star Wars transmedia plan.

In many cases, the action figures that mattered were not those of the big protagonists but those of secondary characters, background figures. In some cases, characters that barely count as extras are given new emphasis and new life as they become part of the personal mythology of the fan. We often tell the story through the example of Boba Fett, who developed a fascination off-screen that far exceeded the amount of screen time granted in the films, and paved the way for him to become a much more central character in the prequels. But I think you could tell the same kinds of stories around characters like Admiral Ackbar, Mon Mothma, or Hammerhead, all

of whom gained greater resonance through their extension in playrooms and playgrounds across the country.

I think this results in several different ways that one might read Star Wars. One is to see Star Wars as the Skywalker saga, which is grounded in the Hero's Journey and which has a singular focus even as it expands outward over time and space. But the second would be to read Star Wars as a world, in which many different parts can be explored, and in which background details can be as rich and meaningful as anything that goes on in the lives of the protagonists. This logic of world-building, of extension, expansion, extraction, shapes all the other elements that would emerge around the Star Wars constellation. Each new extension of the Star Wars text adds potentially more depth or appreciation of the world depicted on screen.

I don't know that there's necessarily a friction between immersion and extraction. I know I originally described this as a kind of paradoxical relationship, one drawing us into the film, one drawing us out of the film. But, in the case of Star Wars, the mastery built up through the extracted elements can result in greater attention or a greater sense of immersion into the world when we return to the film. Immersion involves kinds of recognition, mastery, built-up investments in certain series' elements that pop off the screen, the more we know about them and the more we appreciate them from the world off-screen. This is a sense of making Tatooine and other fictional spaces our own by making them the sites of our collective fantasies.

*DHF: In the many years between the original trilogy and the release of the prequel films, Star Wars moved away somewhat from the cultural mainstream and became something that was more of a "cult text," maintaining its core audience of fans through the production of novels, video games, tabletop RPGs, comics, and collectables. At the same time, the growing popularity of fantastic franchises and the arrival of the internet contributed to fan culture's dramatic growth in that period. How do you look back at this era from the mid-1980s to the late 1990s, and how would you describe Star Wars's position within science-fiction fandom at that time?*

HJ: Around the time that *The Empire Strikes Back* was released, Lucas did what is now a notorious interview with *Time* where he described his vision for the possible future of the Star Wars franchise. He spoke about three trilogies as adding up to the full Star Wars saga. The first was the one initiated by *A New Hope*. Once that was completed, he had announced that he was going to go back and do a series of prequels that told the events surrounding the collapse of the Jedi knights, the Clone Wars, the corruption of Anakin

Skywalker, and the breakdown of his relationship with Obi-Wan Kenobi. After those were completed, and after the actors had a chance to naturally age a bit over time, he planned to go back for a third trilogy, which suggests what happened to these ruling families as they were forced to hold the galaxy together.

As fans, we knew then what to expect from the prequels. They would be Arthurian, operatic, mythic—pick the word of your choice—but shaped by Lucas's particular reading of Joseph Campbell's monomyth theory. All of this pointed towards a more mature, darker conception of the series that would require strong performances to achieve the emotional intensity we wanted to see on the screen. Part of what cemented that sense of a shared conception of the prequels was the beginnings of the internet fandom, certainly by the 1990s. Early internet fandom was marked by sharp divides, flame wars between different factions who had very different sets of expectations about what Star Wars, or any other media property, was supposed to do. But over time, online fan communities tended to develop very strong senses of consensus about a particular media franchise, and that consensus becomes more entitled and empowered over time, so that, by the time the prequels came out, Lucas was facing a very intense and embedded sense of fan expectations, expectations that had been building over almost 20 years during the gap between the films.

You mention here that this fan interest is kept alive by the secondary production by the corporation, but it has also been kept alive by fan-cultural production. Over the 1980s and 1990s, you see the extension of the timeline of Star Wars as fan writers flesh out incidents earlier and earlier and later and later in the life of the characters, and then move beyond them to tell the back story of the Sith or the Jedi, often in ways that extend across centuries. Fans sort through these, debate them, some become semi-canonical in the fans' imagination, and these become central forces shaping what fans want Star Wars to become. During the same time period, we see both the increased visibility of fan-cultural production, and the first rounds of skirmishes with Lucas and the other producers over what the rules of our participation are going to be. And so Star Wars became one of the central battlegrounds by which fan relations to intellectual property would take place.

*DHF: The prequel films were ambitious attempts to flesh out an existing storyworld, but they also seemed to place a very strong emphasis on aspects of the franchise that strengthened two common negative conceptions of Star Wars: first, that it was primarily about visual spectacle and groundbreaking technological effects, and second, that it was targeted at children and therefore*

*fundamentally childish. The CG-character Jar Jar Binks became the focus of fans' criticism in relation to both these points. How did you respond to the reception of the prequel films, and how do you look back on them today?*

HJ: With the release of *The Phantom Menace*, Lucas seemed to seek to further expand Star Wars fandom to a new generation by doubling down on the child-friendly elements that had been prefigured by the Ewoks. It's not simply Jar Jar Binks who generated such intense controversy, but focusing the film around young Anakin Skywalker, who becomes a kind of male equivalent of a Mary Sue, not only someone who can do anything and everything well beyond their age, but also someone on whom the entire future of their universe seems to come to rest. I think from the first, Lucas saw Star Wars as a children's franchise, and in particular as a series of boys' adventure stories aimed at young men as they came of age.

This focus on the child consumer ran smack in the face of the consensus view of what those prequels were supposed to be. These were not the droids we were looking for and, as a result, it would be difficult to describe the resounding cries of disappointment many of us felt when we saw *The Phantom Menace* for the first time; such a sense of letdown, after the high hopes many fans had going into that film. It's not simply the shift of focus from adult storylines to a children's narrative, but it's also the lack of emotional depth in performances. It was very clear from the beginning that these actors with this director were never going to achieve the mythic resonance many of us had expected from the fall of Anakin Skywalker.

The second issue was a tendency to overexplain, which is sort of the core contradiction in transmedia storytelling. Fans often love and desire backstory, and yet a transmedia franchise, as Geoffrey Long has pointed out, requires negative capability. There must be gaps and holes that fans can fill with their own imagination. So, one of those gaps had been how the Force works: many read the Force as an extension of various kinds of Eastern spiritualism, but, with *The Phantom Menace*, we were suddenly given a biological explanation—the notorious midi-chlorians—that becomes so elaborate it shuts down so many of the possibilities that fans had been developing through their own speculation across the decades. This is simply one example of a number of ways in which Lucas's imaginings—which were clearly also retrospective imaginings—are supposed to override fan investment, and often result in fans having to let go of ideas that were much richer and more fully developed in their own grassroots extensions.

We also have to factor in the re-release of the enhanced and expanded versions of the original Star Wars trilogy. By this point, I had royally screwed

up my own son's chance to be of a generation that grew up with Star Wars. My wife and I had set very few rules as parents with regards to media. One was that we said he shouldn't see *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1978) for the first time with his parents in the room, and the second was that he should see Star Wars on the big screen. We couldn't have predicted that more than a decade would pass before Lucas would show the films on the big screen again, and that his generation would have the experience of growing up watching them on VHS. So it was only with the release of the special editions that my son became a Star Wars fan.

What frustrated fans about the release of the digitally enhanced versions was precisely this notion of the author's privilege to rewrite his own work, and Lucas's refusal to continue to provide access to the originals. It's a tension between author's rights and the public's rights: the public's right to access culturally resonant work, to see stories that had been a central part of their cultural identity since childhood. Many of us felt that this was a kind of vandalism, something in the order of colorization, which had been a central controversy during that period of time, and we would have drawn comparisons with other director's cuts, which were always released alongside the original. So, there's an increased sense in first-generation Star Wars fans that something was taken away from them, that the new films were a threat to their fannish investment.

My personal disappointment was so strong that I saw the prequel films only once. My memories of them grow fuzzier with each passing year, and I lost interest in most subsequent Star Wars extensions. So, for me, it's a period in which Star Wars simply faded from being a central text in my canon as a fan to something I used to be interested in. I could still be outraged by some of the further treatment of Lucas by his fans. I ended up being one of the major talking heads, a voice for the prosecution, in the documentary *The People vs. George Lucas* (2010), which is a long indictment of Lucas for the kinds of offenses against fandom that I've just summed up. But Star Wars itself held little appeal to me leading up to the release of *The Force Awakens*.

*DHF: The prequels arrived just as media corporations' once-popular term "synergy" was beginning to go out of fashion, soon to be replaced by other concepts, including "media convergence" and "transmedia storytelling." So, in ways that were different from the earlier trilogy, Lucasfilm, LucasArts, and many of their licensees developed elaborate transmedia extensions that filled in some of the gaps between the films. How important do you think this phase of the Star Wars franchise was for the development of transmedia storytelling*



*forms in the early 21st century? And what do you think were some of the most interesting shapes it took?*

HJ: The animated series *The Clone Wars* and games such as *Knights of the Old Republic* and *Galaxies* were very important for shaping the next phase of Star Wars transmedia extension. These narratives would have been especially important for a generation of fans who had come of age with the prequels, who were looking for more sophisticated versions of the Star Wars stories, a more elaborate mythology, a more fully built-up world, and more interesting plays with the timeline of the story. All of these are classic functions of transmedia extensions.

I think there's a missing chapter in the story that begins slightly earlier with the strategies that George Lucas and Steven Spielberg developed around the Indiana Jones franchise. It's largely forgotten today, but the television series *The Young Indiana Jones Chronicles* (1992-1993) was a serious transmedia extension of that franchise, and one that carefully negotiated between the interests of children, young adults, and adults. Beginning with *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (1989), we got a glimpse of young Indiana Jones that was built into the film itself. The TV show then went back and told stories of the character at various ages. Each story introduced a different chapter in world history, each included cameos by historical figures but also recurring characters that helped us to build up a sense of a larger mythology around the Indiana Jones storyworld. The focus on different ages of the character meant that different segments of the audience could find themselves and their interests within this larger transmedia extension. This is so different from the kind of early experiments in transmedia extension surrounding Star Wars, which were almost always targeted at children, whether we're talking about the *Holiday Special* or the *Ewoks* Saturday morning cartoon series, which suggests perhaps the difference in the ways in which Lucas thought about the fan bases for the two franchises.

DHF: *You have written extensively about fans' complex negotiation (and contestation) of Lucasfilm's claims to intellectual ownership of the storyworld. One well-known chapter in your book Convergence Culture memorably describes the production company's various responses to fans' own creative storyworld extensions and transformations, shifting from a generally "prohibitionist" position to one that has been at times more "collaborationist." How do you think these developments in the industry's responses to fandom have affected a more general change in the way fans are perceived and treated by powerful corporate IP owners?*



HJ: By the time *The Phantom Menace* was released, a strong tradition of amateur Star Wars fan filmmakers had taken root. Around that time, you could find hundreds of amateur Star Wars films, often assembled on web pages celebrating fan contributions to the saga. Some of those films were attempts to replicate Star Wars's digital effects, using the resources of home computers; others parodied Star Wars and expressed, in various ways, fan dissatisfactions or simply playful irreverence towards beloved characters. Some of this might be understood as the working-through of the transition from childhood to adulthood, as might be expressed by the large number of fan films that bashed, abused, slaughtered, or kicked Jar Jar Binks in the groin, who came to stand for the childish elements in the new Star Wars franchise.

One set of those films celebrates fan mastery, the sense that, with the growth of home computing, fans now had access to the tools by which they could create works that would stand alongside more professional Hollywood productions. Others made a virtue of limited resources, a kind of grassroots equivalent of what was dubbed "imperfect cinema" when we're talking about Third World film. Star Wars and Lucas got a lot of credit during this period of time for their celebration of these fan filmmakers, running competitions online and, in some cases, recruiting the best of the fan filmmakers to work on one or another of the transmedia extensions of the Star Wars franchise. Looked at more closely, though, they were carefully policing the activities of the fan community, embracing those forms of fan creativity, such as parody, which enjoyed the greatest protection under US copyright law, and trying to shut down those forms that would have involved a much deeper degree of fan creativity.

Parody certainly has always been popular with male fans, and male fans produced the bulk of these amateur Star Wars films, at least the ones visible through the official competitions. Some have argued that male fan preference for parody suggests an attempt to downplay their emotional investment in the media properties, to hold it at arm's length, to demonstrate their emotional superiority over the media that fuels their creative response. But these fan parodies also took shape precisely because it was a legally permitted space in which fan filmmakers could work. If we look carefully, though, the rules of the Star Wars fan competition rejected other emerging forms of fan media production, which might make their own claims on the character or narrative development, something like the 'shipping that emerges from female-centered fandom, and in particular the kinds of re-use of found footage and the exploration of the emotional lives of characters that characterizes vidding as a particularly female response to Star Wars.

Here's Jim Ward, a vice-president of marketing for Lucasfilm, talking to the *New York Times* in 2002: "We've been very clear all along on where we draw the line. We love our fans, we want them to have fun, but if in fact someone is using our characters to create a story unto itself, that's not in the spirit of what we think fandom is about. Fandom is about celebrating the story the way it is." So there's a sense that Lucas's own creativity was to be celebrated and that fan creativity had to be shut down when it seemed to offer an alternative path forward for the franchise.

Star Wars seems particularly precarious to a new round of policing of intellectual property, because Disney as a studio has historically been highly hostile to any vision of a more open or transformative use of their materials, to the point that they have notoriously sued daycare centers that put pictures of Mickey Mouse on the wall. I know from my own dealings with Disney that the company is in transition, that there are many within the company, especially tied to Marvel and Star Wars, who want to see a more generous and open policy towards transformative production, but the fan policies have not been fully resolved. This is troubling when we consider the sheer range of cult media franchises that Disney now controls, between Pixar films, Disney originals, the Star Wars films, the Marvel films, and the Muppet movies, Disney now owns and controls an incredible chunk of the fantasy life of people all over the planet. And so, if they develop more prohibitionist policies, it's likely to have a chilling effect on fan creativity across the board.

*DHF: Speaking of Disney's acquisition of Lucasfilm, we've seen two remarkable changes since the Star Wars franchise has entered a new phase in its history: firstly, George Lucas is no longer attached to the franchise as its sole "author-god" figure, and second, we are seeing a lot more diversity in terms of the films' representation of gender, sexuality, and ethnicity. Do you think the changes in the makeup of the new films' cast reflect a changing perspective on fandom, or on science-fiction audiences more widely? Why do you think Star Wars was associated for so long with fandom that was strictly white and strictly male? Is it mostly a question of the films' own representation of gender and ethnicity?*

HJ: Frankly, Disney's acquisition of the Star Wars franchise and the news that George Lucas was giving up control over the saga was the best set of developments one could possibly have imagined. Suddenly, Star Wars seemed full of possibility again, in part because it was freeing itself from the increasingly embattled relationship between George Lucas—a cranky old white guy—and his more diverse fan base. As became clear with the

prequels, Lucas had a particularly narrow conception of Star Wars's audience that reflected his own white, male worldview, and he drew on a set of genre conventions, largely without reflection, that dated back to the late-nineteenth/early-twentieth century, and which smacked of the cultural logic of colonialism. Lucas had been clear all along that his desire to make Star Wars was a desire to keep alive the traditions of the movie serials from the 1930s and 1940s, but it seems that he was unable to separate the larger-than-life adventure elements from the exoticization of various races around the world and the kinds of racist depictions of non-white populations that had fueled film series like *Fu Manchu* and *Tarzan*.

The new Star Wars films reflect a fundamental shift in that conception of the audience. For once, Star Wars is ahead of, rather than behind, the curve, in terms of the developments demographically in who is going to the movies in the 21st century. Both of the Star Wars films released so far have strong female protagonists cut from the models developed by YA fiction, especially *The Hunger Games*. Katniss Everdeen could easily have been a prototype for Rey or Jyn Erso. These characters represent a reimagining of the Hero's Journey, no longer about a young man's move into adulthood but now, increasingly, about a young woman empowered and forcing her way into acceptance by a world that still remains somewhat skeptical of female accomplishments. This seems to value the contributions that female fans have made to Star Wars from the very beginning.

Secondly, the new Star Wars shows a recognition of the growing demographic diversity in the United States. Over the last couple of decades, we've seen a shift away from a white majority toward a minority-majority population, and therefore an increased pressure at the box office for representations that speak to Latino and African-American viewers, as well as Arab-American and Asian-American viewers. Hollywood is increasingly encountering this diversity, when it takes its stars and directors on the road to San Diego for Comic-Con. Comic-Con is noteworthy for the high number of female attendees and the visibility of people of color, and there has been a growing number of panels at Comic-Con that become spaces where fans articulate the value they place on diversity and inclusion in genre entertainment. So, in some ways, Comic-Con puts pressure on the entertainment system to provide a different kind of story, a different set of characters that we might not otherwise have seen.

Finally, the third pressure here is the recognition that Star Wars has a global market. We see it in the kind of transnational casting of *Rogue One* in particular, but a simple flip on the internet shows the ways that countries around the world are not only embracing Star Wars but pulling

it towards their own cultural practices. So, in Malaysia and Indonesia, you'll find shadow puppet performances of the Star Wars films; in Russia, it's nesting dolls; in Mexico and much of Latin America, it's piñatas; in Brazil, it's sand sculpture; and, in the Arab world, it's forms of cosplay that incorporate the hijab into the performance of Princess Leia and the other characters. All of this suggests the world wants to participate in Star Wars, and wants to remake it in its own image, and I think we're seeing Hollywood, which increasingly relies on global revenue, becoming more open to the inclusion of characters that represent key markets in the contemporary entertainment system.

All of this creates multiple points of identification within the Star Wars text. Both of the recent films are, in many ways, ensemble stories, no longer simply bound up with the Luke and Anakin Skywalker saga but expanding outward and building on the rich world-building that has shaped Star Wars from the very beginning. The portrayal of these characters of color and these female characters are full of contradictions, not the least of which has been the failure of the Disney marketing wing to fully incorporate them in its strategies.

*DHF: Exactly! This reminds me of how other key industries, like toy companies and fashion designers, have been slow on the uptake, still producing Star Wars figures as a "boys only" genre. When The Force Awakens was released, many fans were disappointed about the extent to which toys and other merchandising were focused on the male characters, while the movie itself had a female hero!*

HJ: I think Disney's failure to produce the Rey toys may reflect something of their own limited understanding of what Star Wars brought to the company. I know when Disney first started acquiring Star Wars and Marvel Studios, many people said that Disney had cornered the market for "princesses," and that it was looking towards these other franchises to provide them with "princes." That's a very gendered understanding of the market, and one that doesn't necessarily reflect where the current generation of consumers are, where we've seen more women and girls embrace superheroes and space opera, and it doesn't reflect the direction taken by more recent Disney films in which women are being given incrementally more active and heroic roles.

During this period of transition, the news media has been preoccupied with the narrative of white male backlash, especially the complaints about having a black stormtrooper in *The Force Awakens*. The news coverage of white male backlash serves the interests of producers, because it allows

them to go slow for fear of alienating the core market segment. But if you look beyond the backlash, we see many signs that fans are actually impatient with the slow process that is being made, in ways that media accounts simply don't document. We can look at the phenomenon of race bending in fan art and fan fiction; we can look at race casting, where fans try to identify what actors of color might play the leads in various popular genre franchises; we might see it in terms of competitions run by fan fiction and fan art sites, which encourage people to develop the secondary characters, particularly characters of color, in new ways.

Certainly, the fan conversations about these diverse characters are sometimes problematic. Many fans of color complain that white fan fiction writers map essentialist narratives onto the bodies of characters of color. More troubling still is that, even with the presence of resources to support a more diverse storytelling, fans, in some cases, are backing away from writing the characters of color. The fan podcast *Fansplaining* recently ran an episode flagging that the Kylo Ren/General Hux pairing had become the dominant one for many fan fiction writers, displacing the more racially diverse pairing of Finn and Poe. Here, we heard fans of color and white fans debate what this displacement might have to tell us about the persistence of various forms of racism within fandom. This is an important conversation about race in contemporary society, one that has far more at stake than white boys pissing and moaning about black stormtroopers. But so far, these debates have gained little attention from mass media and do not seem to be part of the dominant conversation about Star Wars's turn toward a more diverse casting.

*DHF: Star Wars was huge from the moment it opened in 1977. But until recently, it was also—paradoxically—one of the only entertainment franchises that was owned and operated more or less independently from the major Hollywood studios. Now that it's the property of the Disney conglomerate, it has become another pillar within an increasingly monopolistic corporate entertainment industry that now seems focused on fan-pleasing transmedia storyworlds that operate as serialized narratives, as stand-alone blockbusters, and as the “mothership” for endless transmedia extensions and offshoots. Now that producers and marketers seem to have become so good at making fans feel involved and included, where do you see fan culture moving from here? Now that Star Wars movies are being made by self-described Star Wars fans, does fan culture still embody an alternative to corporate-produced mainstream entertainment? As much as I enjoy the stuff that's being made, there's also something depressing and even a little frightening about how well these*

*corporations know what we want and, of course, they're glad to keep giving it to us as long as we're paying for it.*

HJL: George Lucas may have been technically independent from the Hollywood establishment as he took control of the Star Wars franchise, but the irony was that he was running the franchise in a more autocratic and reactionary way than the media conglomerates ever would. His independence meant that he was cut off, in some cases, from trends within Hollywood that increasingly valued fan engagement, which were pushing studio properties to be more responsive to the tastes and interests of their consumers. And he was cut off from critical voices that might have questioned some of his creative choices around the prequels and might have challenged the residual racism they masked. Disney has adopted a more enlightened, more progressive, more responsive version of the franchise in its relationship to media audiences.

So this suggests to us that the models of resistance that come out of Cultural Studies in the 1980s may not really be the best way to account for why fandom matters today. For one thing, what fans historically advocated for has increasingly been incorporated into the core text. In the 1980s and 1990s, we celebrated slash's same-sex romances as a resistance to patriarchal constructions of gender and sexuality. We're now getting hints of same-sex couples within the series proper, with many people reading Chirrut and Baze in *Rogue One* as an old gay couple. Slash fandom, though, was a way of working through how to tell stories of same-sex relationships within the inherited vocabulary of genre fiction, and what needs to happen right now is a working through of the nineteenth-century legacy of these genres to embrace greater racial and ethnic diversity and new configurations of gender and sexuality.

In that sense, fan fiction writers may be doing the work of the studios, but they're also doing work that matters politically, that will have a progressive outcome. Fan fiction writers are going to create many more narratives than will be generated by the studios themselves, all representing a range of different approaches that could be taken in telling the stories of the characters of color. Fans are going to explore the tropes and conventions that are the residue of those earlier historical moments in the evolution of the genre. They're going to rethink and reimagine what constitutes the alien in the space opera tradition, for example.

We're also seeing fans tap in to Star Wars as part of a larger trend of young activists using popular culture as a shared vocabulary for social and political change. In my own research, I'm increasingly talking about

the functions of the civic imagination and the sense that we need shared stories in order for us to imagine what a better world looks like and to work towards its achievement. What we see when we look at Star Wars as a resource for the civic imagination is that the series has been ideologically up for grabs for a long time. We could go back to Ronald Reagan's use of Star Wars to describe his defense system, down to Ted Cruz's embrace of the Jedi Knights to describe his own struggles against the concentrated power of the federal government. For every fan who is outraged by the colonialist fantasies driving Jar Jar Binks, there may be other fans for whom this is a perfect realization of their own reactionary conception of contemporary society.

These two forces came to a head during the last presidential campaign, when fan activist Andrew Slack went to a Cruz rally and gave him a lightsaber, which the candidate took great pleasure in waving about and acknowledging his enthusiasm for the franchise. Then the fan activist asked him, "What kind of Senator are you? Are you Senator Palpatine or are you Senator Organa?" asking questions about ethics, particularly ethics tied to the corrupt campaign finance system. This became the perfect photo op, the perfect clip to circulate on YouTube, to dramatize the ways in which fans were using Star Wars to critique current conditions in their society. The same group of Star Wars activists also have turned May the Fourth, Star Wars day, into a celebration of teachers and public education, a message not out of line with the emphasis on mentorship in the original series, but definitely with a progressive edge at a time when the right is advocating for school vouchers rather than supporting public education.

So we can definitely see the new Star Wars films as demonstrating a shift in the industry's understanding of its fans, a strategy of incorporation and collaboration rather than of prohibition. We're seeing an increased number of research firms working around the entertainment industry who are trying to understand, in more and more complexity, the dynamics of fan investment in media properties and how to maximize the value of fan appreciation. We're seeing mass media accommodate fan culture more and more, and we're seeing more signs of fan service, for better or worse, within the texts themselves. This focus on the diverse audience also reflects a recognition that transmedia allows media producers to serve multiple fan audiences through different kinds of extensions. All of this provides reasons for folks focused on the structure of media industries, the monopoly power of mass media and transnational conglomerates, to provide very cogent critiques about what's happening to Star Wars and other media franchises at the current moment.



But in so far as the Star Wars producers seem determined to serve fans, there is an opportunity for fans to push Hollywood toward more inclusive and diverse forms of representation and to critique and challenge the persistence of colonialist narratives and white supremacist narratives in the ways their genres operate. I've argued for some time now that fandom is born of a mixture of fascination and frustration. If fans did not see potential in the original material, they wouldn't be fans to begin with. But, if the text fully satisfied their demands, there would be no reason to rework it and rewrite it continually in the generative ways that we now associate with media fandom. We do not need to see what fans produce as radically resistant to media narratives; we can see it as in fact actively expanding those media narratives. We can see it as innovative on a grassroots level, testing the waters for future versions of media franchises.





# Part I

“First Steps Into A Larger World”:  
Establishing the Star Wars Storyworld



## 1. “Thank the Maker!”

### George Lucas, Lucasfilm, and the Legends of Transtextual Authorship across the Star Wars Franchise

*Tara Lomax*

The history of the Star Wars franchise is strongly intertwined with the creative and industrial legacy of its creator George Lucas. Beyond establishing the Star Wars mythos, Lucas has had a transformative impact on contemporary Hollywood entertainment through the foundation and management of his production company, Lucasfilm, which includes multiple subsidiaries that have innovated filmmaking and cinema technologies, such as Industrial Light & Magic, Skywalker Sound, THX, LucasArts, and Lucasfilm Animation. His significant role in the creative vision of each of these ventures demonstrates that the nature of Lucas's authorship cannot be contained by one creative practice or role: over his career, Lucas has been director, screenwriter, story developer, producer, editor, and post-production supervisor. This multifaceted creative influence worked toward his “legendary” insistence on authorial control.<sup>1</sup> As a creative and proprietary pursuit, the desire for control has often worked in tension with the transmedial expression and reception of the Star Wars franchise across its long and rich history. For this reason, my objective here is to examine the function of Lucas's singular authorship in the context of the Star Wars franchise's history of transmedia storytelling. I conceptualize his presence as transtextual authorship, in which the singular author is both in control of and subject to the multifarious and dynamic textual relations of transmedia storytelling.

Working in tandem with Lucas's creative goals are the multiple creative media, personae, and practices that constitute an expansive and long-running transmedia franchise such as Star Wars. This includes various directors, screenwriters, and producers, as well as practical and visual effects creators, technological innovators in sound and exhibition, corporate owners and licensees, alongside fan creators and cultural commentators. While this attests to the collaborative and collective potential of authorship in transmedia storytelling, Henry Jenkins draws on Star Wars and George

1 Dale Pollock, *Skywalking: The Life and Films of George Lucas* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1999), 202.

Lucas to acknowledge that “the most successful transmedia franchises have emerged when a single creator or creative unit maintains control.”<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Toby Miller recognizes that, in the production of transmedia storytelling, “intertextuality is everywhere and paratextuality a norm, even as intellectual property [IP] is constantly seeking to secure territory.”<sup>3</sup> Transmedia storytelling, therefore, facilitates a relationship between authorship and textuality that is continually variable and shifting in line with industrial priorities, such as IP and licensing. For these reasons, understanding authorship across the history of the Star Wars franchise necessitates a nuanced view of authorship and textuality, which accounts for the dialogical relations that occur between singular authorship and creative collaboration in the context of a transmedia franchise.

In examining the relationship between Lucas’s authorship and the Star Wars franchise’s transmediality, this chapter consolidates two distinct critical frameworks: first, poststructuralist understandings of the text as multiple, subjective, and decentered, and second, auteur criticism, which has typically been concerned with the subjective control and consistent creative vision of a singular director. This critical convergence provides a means to address the presence of the singular author in the context of a complex transtextual structure like transmedia storytelling. Gérard Genette conceptualizes “transtextuality” and its various typologies, such as para-, inter-, and metatextuality, as a textual system that addresses the “across-ness” of textuality: that is, the “relations between texts, [and] the ways they reread and rewrite one another.”<sup>4</sup> This view endows the transtextual system with the subjective agency that would traditionally be afforded to the singular auteur.

Revisionist understandings of auteur criticism, however, dismiss the auteur-as-subject approach in favor of a text-as-subject perspective to singular authorship. In the 1972 postscript to his seminal treatise on the semiotics of auteur theory, Peter Wollen revised his earlier thoughts to account for the poststructuralist dynamics of textuality: he contends that the text “is open rather than closed; multiple rather than single; productive rather than exhaustive. Although [a text] is produced by an individual, the

2 Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 106.

3 Toby Miller, “Foreword: Transmedia Storytelling and Free Labour,” in *The Rise of Transtexts: Challenges and Opportunities*, eds. Benjamin W.L. Derhy Kurtz and Mélanie Bourdaa (New York: Routledge, 2016), vii.

4 Gerald Prince, foreword to *Palimpsests: Literature in the Second Degree*, by Gérard Genette (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska, 1997), ix.

author, it does not simply represent or express the author's ideas, but exists in its own right."<sup>5</sup> The premise of Wollen's revision is supported by more recent interrogations of auteurism, like Dudley Andrew's argument that "an auteur may be surrounded by the images for which it is claimed he is responsible, while not directing their reading."<sup>6</sup> Singular authorship, according to this framework, is not a super-presence that controls from above, but a transtextual presence that is propelled into a dynamic relationship with multiple texts and other authors. Following this approach, Lucas's transtextual singular authorship has functioned in dialogical relationship with the creative, industrial, and textual forces that have constituted the Star Wars franchise over the last four decades.

### "Thank the Maker!": Lucas as Maker

I invoke C-3PO's rhapsodic cry "Thank the Maker!" from *A New Hope* to frame this chapter, because it functions as a metatextual expression that recognizes the congruity between droid-maker and filmmaker. In Star Wars, the notion of the Maker is analogical to the role of creator in droid vernacular. This association resonates with Star Wars fans, who extended similar adulations to Lucas himself as ultimate Maker of the franchise mythos. Moreover, in echoing the everyday idiom "thank God," C-3PO's expression incidentally recalls romanticized conceptions of the author as divine presence. This is another status previously granted to Lucas himself, who for the first two decades in the history of Star Wars was elevated to the position of "latter-day god"<sup>7</sup> by fans. Both these understandings of the Maker draw on notions of authorship that privilege the vision of a single creator. In consequence, this also places expectations on Lucas that have often put him at odds with Star Wars fans.

Indeed, such praise for Lucas was rescinded by many fans in 1997 with the special edition re-release of the original trilogy and with more intensity in 1999 with the release of *The Phantom Menace*. The special edition, released for the franchise's twentieth anniversary, not only remastered the image

5 Peter Wollen, *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (London: Secker & Warburg; London: BFI, 1972), 163.

6 Dudley Andrew, "The Unauthorized Auteur Today," in *Film Theory Goes to the Movies*, eds. Jim Collins and Ava Preacher Collins (New York: Routledge, 1993), 83.

7 Matthew Wilhelm Kapell, "Conclusion: Finding Myth in the History of Your Own Time," in *Finding the Force of the Star Wars Franchise: Fans, Merchandise, and Critics*, eds. Matthew Wilhelm Kapell and John Shelton Lawrence (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 283.

quality and visual effects, but it added and altered key scenes in ways that changed character traits and plot elements that were deemed sacred by long-time fans. Furthermore, many found the prequel trilogy's focus on digital innovation and computer-generated imagery to have diverged from the aesthetic, technological, and thematic principles of the original trilogy. Will Brooker explains that, for this reason, fans expressed a "harsh voice of criticism directed personally at George Lucas as director, and a general sense of distrust about his ability to handle the mythos."<sup>8</sup> This was most clearly expressed in the documentary *The People vs. George Lucas* (2010), which highlights the tensions that can result between creators and fans of a long-running transmedia franchise. Moreover, the relationship between Lucas and the fans has in many ways provoked, measured, and contended with Lucas's creative journey through authorial control, then disruption, and finally redemption.

### **"I don't remember ever owning a droid": The Peculiar Case of "George Lucas," Property of Lucasfilm**

The nature of Lucas's authorial control is most officially and intriguingly inscribed in his legal dealings with Twentieth Century Fox, during the initial development of what was then, in the early 1970s, titled *The Star Wars*. Most accounts of Lucas's early legal and economic negotiations with Fox refer to his control-oriented decision to refuse an increase in his salary as writer and director in favor of retaining the rights to sequels and merchandise.<sup>9</sup> However, a lesser-known circumstance is how Lucas secured ownership of his IP through a legal dissociation of self. In *The Making of Star Wars*, J.W. Rinzler reveals that "On January 10, 1974, Lucas signed a necessary if somewhat surreal legal agreement with himself, whereby Lucasfilm loaned out 'George Lucas' as director to 'The Star Wars Corporation,' a subsidiary formed to facilitate the upcoming budget and legal dealings with Fox."<sup>10</sup> This peculiar legal procedure constructs Lucas as an authorial double—as George Lucas, owner of Lucasfilm, and as "George Lucas," employee of The Star Wars Corporation. This renders him both owner and property of

8 Will Brooker, *Using the Force: Creativity, Community and Star Wars Fans* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 90.

9 Marcus Hearn, *The Cinema of George Lucas* (New York: Abrams, 2005), 81-82.

10 J.W. Rinzler, *The Making of Star Wars* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2007), 15.

Lucasfilm, thus inscribing his authorial presence with a dialogical dynamic between his role as creator and proprietor.

As a production company, Lucasfilm occupies a position between these two authorial articulations: Lucas and "Lucas." This duality corresponds with Wollen's nominal separation of the auteur identity—distinguishing between with and without inverted commas—in which he argues that "Fuller or Hawks or Hitchcock, the directors, are quite separate from 'Fuller' or 'Hawks' or 'Hitchcock,' the structures named after them."<sup>11</sup> Therefore, "Lucas" is a legal-industrial structure that represents Lucas's commitment to securing control of his IP and creative license. This legal agreement might not have immediate transtextual substance. For Genette, however, the practice of naming the author has paratextual significance, whereby "the author's name fulfills a contractual function" between audience, reader, and text.<sup>12</sup> In Lucas's case, part of what makes the legal expression of his name so significant is that the Lucasfilm trademark simultaneously represents multiple Lucas-oriented roles: Lucas the creator, "George Lucas" the legal entity, and Lucasfilm the corporate brand. Jonathan Gray considers how the author as brand becomes "an inter- or paratextual framing device," thereby rendering the author's name "a paratext that manages a broader textual system."<sup>13</sup> If the idiosyncrasy of this legal procedure comes out of the doubling of Lucas's authorial identity, as argued above, it also relates to the practice of attaching a nominal signature to the text because, as Gray explains, "we can only approach texts *through* paratexts."<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the glistening green Lucasfilm trademark<sup>15</sup> that precedes each Star Wars text represents the paratextual function of Lucas's name, marking the entry point through which one approaches the text while also serving as a mediating device between author, text, and audience.

11 Wollen, *Signs and Meaning*, 168.

12 Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 41.

13 Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 127.

14 Gray, *Show Sold Separately*, 25.

15 It should be noted that, although the Lucasfilm trademark has, until recently, been a variant of green in each Star Wars appearance, it did not glisten until it was remastered for the 1997 special edition.



## “Join me and together we will rule the galaxy!”: Lucas as Vader and the Empire of Irony

Lucas's long-lasting aversion to the structures and conventions of the Hollywood establishment is critical to any understanding of the industrial lore that surrounds the Star Wars franchise. Since graduating from film school, Lucas has openly expressed distrust and cynicism towards the unchecked authority of the Hollywood studio system, especially due to the way it unjustly controlled the creative process. The experiences with his first two studio productions, *THX-1138* (1971) and *American Graffiti* (1973), “turned Lucas’s mistrust of corporate Hollywood into resentment”<sup>16</sup> and heightened his determination to secure creative control of Star Wars. This provoked his progression from a young experimental filmmaker, who valued the communal environment of Francis Ford Coppola’s independent studio American Zoetrope at the end of the 1960s into the early 1970s, to a producer of blockbuster movies, who independently owned and managed Lucasfilm from 1971 until 2012. Moreover, extending from this unrelenting commitment to securing creative control is his tendency towards thematic contradiction. Brooker characterizes Lucas’s autobiographical and auteurist sensibilities as “dealing with his own conflicting desires for human community and solitude, order and creativity, discipline and play.”<sup>17</sup> This creative exploration of the paradoxes of humanity parallels Lucas’s progression from an independent-minded young filmmaker to a corporate Hollywood mogul.

The irony of Lucas’s movement from being against the Hollywood establishment to reinventing the contemporary entertainment industry has been acknowledged by Lucas himself. In the documentary *Empire of Dreams*, he reveals:

What I was trying to do was stay independent so I could make the movies I wanted to make, but at the same time I was fighting the corporate system. [...] But now I’ve found myself being the head of a corporation, so there’s a certain irony there, that I’ve become the very thing that I was trying to avoid. Which basically is what part of *Star Wars* is about—that is, Darth Vader.<sup>18</sup>

16 Hearn, *The Cinema of George Lucas*, 43.

17 Will Brooker, *Star Wars* (London: BFI Classics, 2009), 83.

18 *Empire of Dreams: The Story of the Star Wars Trilogy*, dir. Kevin Burns (Los Angeles: Prometheus Entertainment, 2004).

This expresses many of the concerns that shaped Lucas's journey as auteur, including the resistance against industrial structures and the irony of becoming the very thing he fought against. It also highlights Lucas's continuing commitment to securing creative independence and control. What is most significant about this confession is how Lucas self-reflexively identifies with Vader, as they both must manage the consequences, implications, and resistances to their galactic creations.

Lucas's inadvertent association with Vader has also not been lost on scholars and critics. As Karina Longworth suggests, "Lucas's experimental filmmaking ambitions may have remained unrealized, but a more sympathetic read suggests that for Lucas, as for Vader, this was not a choice at all: instead, he has become trapped by his own creation, a rebel whose phenomenal success turned him, unwillingly, into an impenetrable power."<sup>19</sup> This notion of being trapped by his own creation expresses how the Star Wars franchise has taken on a transtextual momentum of its own, one that unconsciously inscribes its author into its textual system and which Lucas could neither have predicted nor controlled. Similarly, Wollen considers how "a text can produce spaces within meaning, within the otherwise rigid straitjacket of the message, to produce a meaning of a new kind, generated within the text itself."<sup>20</sup> Privileging the subjective agency of the text, Wollen argues, is therefore essential to a revisionist approach to auteur criticism.

### "I am C-3PO, Human-Cyborg Relations": Intertextualizing C-3PO

C-3PO and his counterpart R2-D2 are the most consistent characters across the Star Wars franchise, appearing in every canonical film and television series to date, as well as multiple comic books, novels, and video games. C-3PO and R2-D2 are the first characters to be introduced, driving the plot forward in the first act of *A New Hope*. Therefore, the two droids are important figures for representing and maintaining textual cohesion and stability (as well as humor) across the transmedia franchise. More specifically, as a protocol droid who is programmed for "human-cyborg relations" and is "fluent in over six million forms of communication," C-3PO frequently functions as mediator between characters. As oral narrator by the campfire in *Return of the Jedi*, C-3PO's role even extends to playing the part of storyteller, where he uses diegetic sound recordings to reenact a

19 Karina Longworth, *Masters of Cinema: George Lucas* (London: Phaidon Press, 2012), 96-97.

20 Wollen, *Signs and Meaning*, 162.

truncated version of the original trilogy to the Ewoks. Like Lucas's authorial presence, therefore, C-3PO and R2-D2 are, to draw on Julia Kristeva's explication of intertextuality, an "inescapable link between texts."<sup>21</sup> This not only makes C-3PO a diegetic mediator, but also an intertextual anchor across the franchise's multiple texts and media forms.

Intertextuality conceptualizes the relationship across and between texts as a relational dialogism. For Kristeva, this dynamic is instrumental in propelling the author from a position that operates and controls from outside of the text, to one where the author is "transformed by his having included himself within the narrative system."<sup>22</sup> Wollen conveys a similar idea when he describes the auteur as "an unconscious catalyst" of a dynamic textual system,<sup>23</sup> while Timothy Corrigan also considers how the auteur becomes "absorbed as a phantom presence" within the text.<sup>24</sup> C-3PO can therefore be read as a presence that unwittingly mirrors some of the ways in which Lucas exists as an "unconscious catalyst" and "phantom presence" across the transtextual system of the Star Wars franchise. In *The Phantom Menace*, the revelation that Anakin Skywalker—and therefore Vader—is C-3PO's Maker further affirms a connection between C-3PO and Lucas. Indeed, when C-3PO exclaims "Thank the Maker!" in *A New Hope*, he inadvertently invokes both Lucas and Anakin, thus conveniently establishing a dialogism not only between author and text, but also between multiple texts. In this way, C-3PO becomes an intertextual anchor reflecting Lucas's contradictory authorial presence: his consistent presence throughout the franchise projecting coherence even as his transformations betray Lucas's own contested and ambiguous authorial role.

### "My parts are showing!": When the Maker Comes Undone

Across the history of the Star Wars franchise, C-3PO experiences many instances of physical dismemberment, instability, and incompleteness, thereby illustrating how the character also functions as a phantom presence of Lucas's contradictory role as author figure. On one hand, C-3PO represents consistence, cohesion, and communication across the Star Wars

21 Gray, *Show Sold Separately*, 31.

22 Julia Kristeva, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980), 74.

23 Wollen, *Signs and Meaning*, 168.

24 Timothy Corrigan, "Auteurs and the New Hollywood," in *The New American Cinema*, ed. Jon Lewis (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 42.

franchise's transmedia articulations—as an interpreter, but also as an intertextual anchor. However, on the other hand—well, the other hand, like his other parts, has unfortunately been dismembered. I contend that C-3PO's dismemberment playfully expresses how Lucas's attempt to achieve complete authorial control has been shaped, regulated, and undermined by various surrounding forces, like other executives and creators, technological limitations, fans and commentators, and the inevitable contradictions and transformations that arise across any author's career.

In *A New Hope*, C-3PO is attacked by Tusken Raiders and his arm is shot off. In *The Empire Strikes Back* his entire body is disassembled into parts. In *Return of the Jedi*, his eye is gouged out by the Kowakian monkey-lizard Salacious B. Crumb at Jabba the Hutt's palace. Then, in the prequel *The Phantom Menace*, he appears as a mechanical skeleton, his cables and gears markedly exposed. By *Attack of the Clones* he has been provided with make-shift silver coverings, but finds himself on a factory conveyer belt where his head and body are pulled apart and switched with a battle droid. Finally, at the end of *Revenge of the Sith*, C-3PO's memory is completely erased. These constant disruptions to C-3PO's body and mind intersect with his function as an "unconscious catalyst" of Lucas's unstable authorial presence. C-3PO's susceptibility to physical dismemberment and his ongoing need for repair and reconditioning can be read as an inadvertent expression of Lucas's continuous process of authorial revision.

Of special significance in this reading of Lucas's authorial disruption and reconditioning is C-3PO's stripped-down and exposed form in *The Phantom Menace*, which signifies the attempt to reformulate (that is to say, re-"make") Lucas's authorial presence, but also to expose its inherent vulnerability. First, as discussed above, the revelation that Vader is C-3PO's Maker conveniently affirms a potential authorial connection between Lucas and C-3PO via Anakin/Vader. Second, this revelation is accompanied by C-3PO's humiliation when R2-D2 teases him for being naked, thus suggesting a subtext for realizing that achieving ultimate creative control can also make one vulnerable.<sup>25</sup> As Longworth recognizes, "the prequels are, for better and for worse, pure Lucas. They were built so independently that there was no one to tell him 'no.'"<sup>26</sup> In this way, C-3PO's incomplete body symbolizes how the prequel trilogy was an opportunity for Lucas to

25 In making the prequel trilogy, Lucas took on the roles of director, screenwriter, editing supervisor, and executive producer, despite his repeatedly expressed distaste for directing and writing.

26 Longworth, *Masters of Cinema*, 92.

complete his unfinished work without restriction, because the “difference between Star Wars and other franchises ... is that Lucas cannot seem to leave his ostensibly completed series alone.”<sup>27</sup> However, the prequel logic through which C-3PO’s “origin” is realized further characterizes Lucas’s authorial control of the franchise as something that can never be truly completed. When C-3PO bids farewell to Anakin in *The Phantom Menace*, he admits that “you are my Maker and I wish you well; however, I should prefer I were a little more completed.” C-3PO’s incomplete body, therefore, might be thought of as visualizing authorial anxieties about how to maintain authorship over a franchise that will perpetually remain unfinished.

While Vader never acknowledges that he is C-3PO’s Maker in the films, the licensed comic-book series *Star Wars Tales* provides a “What if?” scenario with the short story aptly titled “Thank the Maker.”<sup>28</sup> In this story, set during the events on Cloud City in *The Empire Strikes Back*, Vader shares a moment with a disassembled C-3PO, decades after their last parting in *Revenge of the Sith*. As Vader grasps C-3PO’s head, the reader is transported to Vader’s childhood memory of finding discarded droid parts in Watto’s junkyard on Tatooine. The comic book juxtaposes two panels (figure 1.1) that are similar in framing, composition, and layout, but which present a spatiotemporal crossover between young Anakin and Vader, both holding C-3PO’s head in the same pose. Then, in a later panel (figure 1.2), Vader holds C-3PO’s head up for an iconic meeting between Maker and creation. Therefore, this story (intra)textually intervenes into the plot of *The Empire Strikes Back* during the events in Cloud City, and recalls memories inspired by *The Phantom Menace* that harken back to a young Anakin on Tatooine.

As a licensed comic now classified under the Legends banner,<sup>29</sup> “Thank the Maker” explores the relationship between Lucas’s storyworld and licensed content. In one way, it participates in the transtextual disruption of Lucas’s authorial presence, because it intervenes in the plot involving C-3PO’s dismembered body. Furthermore, C-3PO is deactivated during this encounter with Vader and therefore has no capacity to engage with his Maker. Similarly, Lucas claims to have intentionally divorced himself from

27 Longworth, *Masters of Cinema*, 93.

28 “Thank the Maker,” written by Ryder Windham, penciled by Killian Plunkett, lettered by Steve Dutro, and colored by Dave McCaig, in *Star Wars Tales*, no. 6 (Milwaukie, OR: Dark Horse Comics, December 2000).

29 In 2014, all licensed Star Wars content across multiple media platforms and outside the official films and television series, was retroactively classified under a new continuity banner, Star Wars Legends. This content was previously organized using the multi-tiered system of the EU.



Fig. 1.1: Vader recalls a memory of making C-3PO when he was a boy



Fig. 1.2: Vader and C-3PO reunite in "Thank the Maker"

licensed texts. Although he had a varied degree of involvement, he admitted, "I don't read that stuff ... That's a different world than my world."<sup>30</sup> In another way, this comic-book story works to resolve this division through a meta-textual dialogue across media and authors. Published after *The Phantom Menace*, it is creatively inspired by canonical plot, imagery, and character development as it responds to the retroactive revelation that Anakin is C-3PO's Maker. In this way, the integration of multiple texts—both Lucas's

30 Ian Spelling, "New Hopes," *Starlog* 337 (August 2005), 48.

own and the licensed content of the transmedia franchise—complicates Lucas's deliberate separation of his own world from the licensed works he perceives as ancillary.

### **“You probably don’t recognize me because of the red arm”: Introducing New Makers**

In 2012, The Walt Disney Company acquired Lucasfilm, its subsidiaries, and its IP, initiating a new era for the Star Wars franchise. For Lucas, this signaled his retirement from Star Wars and a departure from the empire he created; for Lucasfilm, this introduced a new authorial dynamic with new Makers: including Kathleen Kennedy as president, the Lucasfilm Story Group as development team, new directors for each film, and many diverse creative roles across multiple media. Therefore, in the current era of the Star Wars franchise's transmedia history, “the auteur gives way to the team player.”<sup>31</sup> This suggests an authorial structure that ostensibly supersedes the singular author role. However, a more practical critical account should recognize that this new authorial structure still facilitates the authorial presence of a singular auteur brand. This is demonstrated by the appointment of J.J. Abrams as director of *The Force Awakens*, the first installment released under this new ownership and authorial structure, and the strategic assigning of auteur-type figures who have a background in independent filmmaking, like Gareth Edwards, Rian Johnson, and Colin Trevorrow.<sup>32</sup>

For C-3PO, this new authorial structure is represented by yet another physical transformation: a new dismemberment and a red limb replacement. When C-3PO appears in *The Force Awakens*, he interrupts Han and Leia's reunion and declares, “It is I, C-3PO—you probably don’t recognize me because of the red arm.” The comically exaggerated risk of misrecognition causes C-3PO anxiety as his function as protocol droid now extends to the mediation of multiple authors: Lucas and Abrams, but also other authorial roles held at Lucasfilm. Regarding C-3PO's discernible red arm, Abrams unequivocally concedes that he “wanted to mark him.”<sup>33</sup> Anthony Daniels,

31 Adam Rogers, “You Won’t Live to See the Final Star Wars Movie,” *Wired*, December 2015, accessed February 28, 2017, <http://www.wired.com/2015/11/building-the-star-wars-universe/>.

32 Directors of *Rogue One* (2016) and the forthcoming movies *The Last Jedi* (2017) and the as-yet untitled ninth “saga” film (2019), respectively.

33 Qtd. in Laurent Bouzereau, *Secrets of The Force Awakens: A Cinematic Journey*, disc 3, *Star Wars: Episode VII—The Force Awakens*, Blu-Ray, directed by J.J. Abrams (San Francisco, CA: Lucasfilm, 2016).



who has performed the role of C-3PO in every episode to date, also reveals that "the one thing that J.J. and I argued about was the fact that ... C-3PO doesn't like the red arm!"<sup>34</sup> Nonetheless, Abrams unwaveringly insisted on this new physical transformation, which emphasizes his influence as a new Maker in the Star Wars franchise by explicitly harnessing C-3PO as a catalyst for authorial presence.

*The Force Awakens* never explains C-3PO's obtrusive limb replacement, but the Marvel Comics one-shot "The Phantom Limb"<sup>35</sup> reveals how C-3PO loses it on a mission for the Resistance, adopting the red replacement as a tribute to a fallen droid comrade. In usual C-3PO fashion, however, he worries that the red limb will tarnish his personal style: "this arm offends my aesthetic sensibilities."<sup>36</sup> Continuing the interpretation of C-3PO developed in this chapter, this offense to his aesthetic sensibilities can be construed as a metatextual disapproval of being continually harnessed as a symbolic representation of transtextual authorship.

### "You are my Maker and I wish you well": Recognizing the Legend(s)

As Lucasfilm continues to shape the future of its transmedia franchise, Lucas has once again returned to his long-held intention to continue the experimental work of his earlier filmmaking days,<sup>37</sup> before the Star Wars franchise and the entertainment empire he inadvertently created. Nonetheless, Lucas's authorial significance remains in perpetual dialogue with the shifting creative contributions across the past, present, and future of the Star War franchise. While team-structured collaborative authorship is an important aspect of transmedia storytelling, this does not preclude the potential to identify a transtextual presence of singular authorship. Therefore, the expansive transmedia history of the Star Wars franchise demonstrates the need and potential to conceive of transmedia texts not

34 George Simpson, "Star Wars: Anthony Daniels Disliked C-3PO's New Red Arm," *Screenrant*, March 20, 2016, accessed February 26, 2016, <http://screenrant.com/star-wars-force-awakens-c3po-arm/>.

35 James Robinson, et al., *Star Wars Special: C-3PO 1: The Phantom Limb*, Marvel Comics, April 2016.

36 Robinson, et al., *Phantom Limb*, 30.

37 Steven Zeitchik, "Tribeca 2015: George Lucas Just Wants to Make Experimental Films," *Los Angeles Times*, April 18, 2015, accessed April 4, 2017, <http://www.latimes.com/entertainment/movies/moviesnow/la-et-mn-george-lucas-tribeca-star-wars-celebration-20150418-story.html>.



as either entirely auteur-driven or team-based, but as a site of dialogical relations between singular notions of authorship and collaborative creative practices. And so, despite the transmedial shifts and mutations that take place across Star Wars, Lucas will forever be “imagined to stand at the threshold between creativity, innovation, wonder, and magic, and us”<sup>38</sup> as multiple authors continue to shape the Star Wars franchise.

38 Derek Johnson and Jonathan Gray, “Introduction: The Problem of Media Authorship,” in *A Companion to Media Authorship*, ed. Jonathan Gray and Derek Johnson (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 3.

## 2. Han Leia Shot First

### Transmedia Storytelling and the National Public Radio Dramatization of Star Wars

*Jeremy W. Webster*

Shortly after the premiere of *A New Hope*, Richard Toscan, head of the theater department at the University of Southern California, conceived of producing the film as a radio play. George Lucas liked the idea of supporting his alma mater through such a project, especially “[a]t a time when Star Wars tie-in rights were like a license to print money, and various commercial broadcast and recording interests were pursuing radio licensing.” In March 1979, he announced a deal that gave KUSC-FM, USC’s public radio affiliate, the rights to produce a radio adaptation for \$1. *Star Wars: The Radio Drama (TRD)* premiered on March 2, 1981 to massive audiences and immediately “became NPR’s most popular dramatic series.”<sup>2</sup>

In spite of this initial popularity, *TRD* is now familiar to only the most ardent of fans, has largely been neglected by scholars, and has since been overwritten in the canon by the Lucasfilm Story Group’s new continuity system. Radio more generally has all but disappeared as a platform for transmedia storytelling, replaced by digital media such as games and audiobooks. Matthew Freeman argues “that it is the strategies behind the production of transmedia storytelling—rather than the specifically converged structures of contemporary media industries and technologies—that ultimately hold transmedia story worlds together and point their audiences across media.”<sup>3</sup> This chapter takes Freeman’s argument as its starting point and explicates the aural strategies of *TRD* to suggest that this radio play successfully builds its world by drawing upon the familiar sounds of *A New Hope* while simultaneously exciting its listeners’ imaginations with new sounds centered on the process of character-building. This can best be demonstrated by focusing on the radio play’s depiction of Princess Leia Organa within the context of the larger Star Wars transmedia franchise as it developed in the late 1970s.

1 Brian Daley, introduction to *Star Wars: The National Public Radio Dramatization* (New York: Del Rey, 1994), 4.

2 Daley, *Radio Dramatization*, 11.

3 Matthew Freeman, *Historicising Transmedia Storytelling: Early Twentieth-Century Transmedia Story Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 4.

*TRD*'s premiere represents the endpoint of what could be described as the initial flowering of Star Wars as a transmedia empire between 1976 and 1981. Throughout this period, the basic story of Star Wars was presented to consumers in multiple media platforms—film, novel, comic books, arcade games, and radio—with each platform “exploring different aspects of the shared world.”<sup>4</sup> According to Freeman, one of the most important elements of this shared world is character building, since “character is one way of holding a transmedia world story together.”<sup>5</sup> Take, for example, *A New Hope*'s depiction of Leia's capture by stormtroopers, which begins six minutes into the movie. Four troopers search a corridor. The camera cuts to Leia with her trademark hairdo peeking out from around a corner. Her blaster is clearly visible; she holds it with both hands at chest level. The barrel is pointing up. She appears to be alert and resolved. The camera then cuts back to the stormtroopers. The first trooper notices her movement and turns towards her. He sees her down the passageway as she moves back slightly. The trooper informs the other soldiers: “There's one; set for stun.” As the first stormtrooper raises his pistol, Leia shoots and kills him. She attempts to run away, but the next nearest trooper moves forward and stuns her, causing Leia to fall to the floor. That stormtrooper then says to the other soldiers, “She'll be all right. Inform Lord Vader we have a prisoner.” As is typical in the film, this 23-second scene emphasizes action and adventure through its quick cuts and musical score over character development or exposition of theme, but it is the representation of Leia as a character in subsequent transmedia presentations of this scene that holds the Star Wars story together.

Fans could also read the novel of the film, originally titled *Star Wars: From the Adventures of Luke Skywalker*, which was published five months before the film's premiere. Attributed to Lucas but written by Alan Dean Foster, the novel, which sold out its initial run of 125,000 copies by February 1977, is perhaps most notable for allowing its readers to experience the interiority of characters from the film. Surprisingly, its depiction of Leia's capture emphasizes the stormtrooper's point of view over hers and begins by describing his movements: “He was about to turn and call for those behind to follow him forward when he noticed something moving off to one side. It appeared to be crouching back in a small, dark alcove. Holding his pistol

4 Paolo Bertetti, “Toward a Typology of Transmedia Characters,” *International Journal of Communications* 8 (2014): 2346.

5 Freeman, *Historicising Transmedia Storytelling*, 24.

ready, he moved cautiously forward and peered into the recess.”<sup>6</sup> A “small, shivering figure clad in flowing white” stares up at him. He recognizes her as “the one individual the Dark Lord was most interested in,” and the novel allows the reader to enter his thoughts: “A lucky encounter for him. He would be commended.” As the trooper contemplates his reward, however, Leia’s demeanor changes:

Within the armor his head turned slightly, directing his voice to the tiny condenser microphone. “Here she is,” he called to those behind him. “Set for stun forc—”

He never finished the sentence, just as he would never receive the hoped-for commendation. Once his attention turned from the girl to his communicator the shivering vanished with startling speed. The energy pistol she had held out of sight behind her came up and around as she burst from her hiding place.

The trooper who had been unlucky enough to find her fell first, his head a mass of melted bone and metal. The same fate met the second armored form coming up fast behind him. Then a bright green energy pole touched the woman’s side and she slumped instantly to the deck, the pistol still locked in her small palm.<sup>7</sup>

Although the film establishes Leia’s willingness to shoot the stormtroopers, the novelization allows its readers to imagine the consequences of her act more vividly by narrating the stormtrooper’s thoughts and aspirations. She leaves the trooper’s “head a mass of melted bone and metal,” a much more brutal image than the film’s bloodless violence and, in doing so, she has killed a man, not just a nameless, replaceable stormtrooper. Within the transmedia story, this association of violence with Leia begins to accrue around her character and is later passed on to subsequent platforms’ representations of her.

In the weeks leading up to the premiere of *A New Hope*, consumers could also experience the “Greatest Space-Fantasy Film of All!” in comic-book form via the first three issues of a six-issue series published by Marvel Comics, scripted by Roy Thomas and illustrated by Howard Chaykin.<sup>8</sup> The comic depicts Leia’s capture across four panels. The first presents her in the foreground, her blaster visible by her side, while a stormtrooper enters

6 George Lucas, *Star Wars: A New Hope* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1976), 12.

7 Lucas, *Star Wars*, 12.

8 *Star Wars Omnibus: A Long Time Ago, Volume 1* (Milwaukie, OR: Dark Horse Books, 2010), 4.

through a passageway. The trooper sees her and exclaims, "There's one of them! Set weapons for stun!" The second panel reverses the perspective—Leia is now in the background, and the stormtroopers are in the foreground—as Leia calls out, "I've set mine to kill!" Her blaster discharges and two of the troopers fall to the ground. The third panel depicts her being stunned and the fourth shows Leia on the ground at the troopers' feet. One of the troopers states, "She'll be all right. Report to Lord Vader!" Despite its brevity, the comic departs from the previous versions in two significant ways. First, the conventions of mid-1970s mainstream comics art portray Leia in a much more sexualized way than any of the other texts. Her white dress is tighter and more revealing. Two of the four frames depicting her capture emphasize her femininity by foregrounding her breasts. The third frame particularly presents her in a pose reminiscent of pin-ups: her breasts are prominent and the contours of her torso are visible as she falls backwards. The final frame illustrates her on the floor, surrounded by the boots of stormtroopers, indicating her complete vulnerability. This image emphasizes the physical threat they pose to her as one straddles her legs while the other straddles her head and shoulders. Second, Leia explicitly reveals her intent to kill the stormtroopers even though they have made it clear that their weapons are set to stun. Because the troopers are depicted only as dehumanized physical threats to her in the comic books, Leia's aggressiveness, militaristic ability, and heroic fortitude in the comic adds to her character in the larger transmedia universe.

*TRD* tells the same basic story as the other media but requires its listeners to imagine the visuals of the film. Radio has often been called "the theater of the mind," since it "evokes scenes through speech, reverb, filter, segue, and other devices."<sup>9</sup> Frank Brady suggests that *TRD*'s success was due to the fact that "the listener becomes the set designer, the costumer, the casting director," which creates "more impact, more personal involvement" than watching a theater screen. Because listeners take on an active role in imagining the world of the radio play, Brady argues, "the tactical warfare between the Falcon and the Death Star can become more real, more vital, than they were in the film."<sup>10</sup> While this is probably true, *TRD*'s world-building is nevertheless productively augmented by a listener's preexisting familiarity with *A New Hope* (as well as potentially the novel and comics).

9 Neil Verma, *Theater of the Mind: Imagination, Aesthetics, and American Radio Drama* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 9.

10 Frank Brady, "Star Wars Comes to Radio," *Fantastic Films* 24 (June 1981): 50.

The radio play's version of Leia's capture illustrates this vividly. Similar to the novel's incorporation of the stormtrooper's perspective, only the troopers have dialogue in the radio play's scene. One stormtrooper instructs his soldiers to "Search every passageway and compartment! You two, check over there behind those power conduits!" A second trooper notices Leia: "Wait! I thought I saw something!" After a brief pause during which he hears a female's breathing, the second trooper continues, "There she is! Set your weapons to stun!" Unlike the comic book version of this scene, Leia does not say anything to the troopers; we only hear her blaster being fired and the sound of a trooper crying out followed by the thud of his body hitting the floor. The second trooper calls out, "Watch it! She's armed! Fire!" The audience then hears more blaster fire. Leia moans and we hear her body fall to the deck. The scene ends with the trooper commending his men: "Good shooting. She'll be all right. Inform Lord Vader that we have a prisoner." Apart from Leia's breathing and the sound of her firing her pistol, we have no sense of *her* in this scene. *TRD* leaves all of the details—her look, posture, and state of mind, as well as the number of stormtroopers, the length of the passageway, the colors of the décor, etc.—to the listener's imagination. Listeners who have previously seen *A New Hope* easily fill in these details by recalling them from the film.

Consequently, *TRD*'s world-building is partially assisted by fans of the film remembering what they have previously seen or read—they already know the basic details of Leia's capture and can fill in gaps in the soundscape with appropriate details. But its world-building is also partially original due to slight changes to dialogue (the stormtrooper's lines are different) and the reliance on sound alone (we hear Leia breathe rather than seeing her). The radio play's voice performers further this same, yet different effect. Only two of the actors, Mark Hamill and Anthony Daniels, reprise their roles, while new performers voice all of the other characters. Most notably, unknown actress Ann Sachs replaces Carrie Fisher as Leia, Perry King performs as Han Solo, and Brock Peters voices Darth Vader instead of James Earl Jones. The latter casting especially changes the audience's response to the character, since, as Daley notes, Jones's "resonant, powerful voice was even more definitive of the Dark Lord of the Sith than that black armor, cloak, and helmet were."<sup>11</sup> Peters's voice is noticeably less deep than Jones's, making his Darth Vader sound more mechanical than the character in the film. As a result of the radio play's use of new sounds, listeners actively build the world of *TRD* by combining elements that explicitly remind them

11 Daley, *Radio Dramatization*, 10.

of the film—Hamill's and Daniels's voices, for example—with elements that are entirely unique to this medium, creating an especially interactive version of the story.

These latter elements include a number of new plot developments resulting from *TRD*'s expanded running time. While there is less than a half-hour of dialogue in the 121-minute film, the radio play runs for 351 minutes. This substantially longer length allows it to introduce new characters, include scenes from earlier drafts of George Lucas's screenplay and the novel, and expand plot points only mentioned in the film. As Daley sums up:

Leia Organa's life on Alderaan and her early Rebel Alliance heroism; Luke's frictions and adventures with his Toschi Station buddies; how Han Solo gets an offer from Big Bunji and almost backs out of that charter with Luke and Ben; Darth Vader's malevolent dark side inquisition of Leia, and her courageous resistance—the radio production gave us the opportunity to look into these matters and many more.<sup>12</sup>

The effect of these scenes on the listener goes beyond simply filling in plot points in the film. Rather, they also suggest that the fundamental strategy behind the production of *TRD*'s transmedia storytelling is an emphasis on character building by giving familiar characters, such as Leia, Luke Skywalker, and even Darth Vader, new and original dimensionality. Daley's radio dramatization presents seven scenes not contained in the film. While Luke, Obi-Wan Kenobi, Han Solo, the droids, and Darth Vader feature in many of these scenes, three of them feature Leia as the primary character without Luke or Han, which is more than those featuring either of them without her.

By 1981, Leia had already become a subject of film criticism. Dan Rubey, for example, argued in 1978 that “despite her attractive spunkiness and toughness,” Leia “is the traditional damsel in distress—her capture by Darth Vader begins the film and provides the motivation for Ben Kenobi's return and Luke's rescue mission.” Although she “does grab a laser gun at one point and fires a few shots,” Rubey maintains that Leia “is dependent on her male rescuers, and the only action she initiates during the rescue almost gets them killed in a garbage crusher.”<sup>13</sup> Consumers of the larger Star Wars transmedia universe know that Leia generally has an even more significant role in it than she does in the 1977 film, and, as we have already seen, the

<sup>12</sup> Daley, *Radio Dramatization*, 4.

<sup>13</sup> Dan Rubey, “Star Wars: Not so Long Ago, Not so Far Away,” *Jump Cut* 18 (August 1978): 12.

novel and comics place greater emphasis on the preemptive violence that she is willing to use against her enemies, a violence seemingly at odds with her assertion to the Grand Moff Tarkin in *A New Hope* that “Alderaan is peaceful; we have no weapons.”

*TRD* continues and expands upon the association of Leia with violence, casting her as the focal point of a debate on the ethics of violent resistance to oppression, a debate that adds significant weight to her decision to “grab a laser gun” and “fire a few shots.” It does this in three ways. First, the radio play emphasizes that, before her capture, Leia is independent and strategic. Her story is larger than just being captured by Darth Vader. Second, it explores her transition from believing in pacifism to embracing violence, providing her with reasons to take up arms and “showing” her struggle to reconcile her home world’s pacifism with the universe’s need for militarized heroes. Finally, it expands her role after she is captured and valorizes her resistance to Imperial efforts to force her to reveal the locale of the Rebel base.

Two of Leia’s new scenes take place before she is captured. Throughout these scenes, she is portrayed as a capable leader who easily outwits Imperial efforts to reveal her connection to the Rebellion. The first of these scenes is in “Episode Two: Points of Origin,” which begins with the narrator, voiced by Ken Hiller, describing the situation:

A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away there came a time of revolution, when Rebels united to challenge a tyrannical Empire. The Rebellion had its origins on many worlds, at many levels of society.

One of the leaders of the Rebellion is the Princess Leia Organa of Alderaan, but neither her high birth nor her status as an Imperial Senator will protect her should her Rebel affiliations be discovered.<sup>14</sup>

Leia’s ship, *Tantive IV*, has been intercepted and forced to land on Ralltiir, a planet occupied by the Imperial army. As the *Tantive* lands, Lord Tion, the Imperial officer in charge, asks his men, “Do we have our heavy weapons trained on that ship?” A commander responds, “We do, Lord Tion, but the ship appears to be just what she claims, a consular ship on a diplomatic mission.” Tion admonishes the commander to follow protocol: “I have no doubt that she is. Princess Leia of Alderaan is a veritable angel of mercy. Still, we mustn’t become lax.” Tion’s description of Leia as “a veritable angel

14 *Star Wars: The Radio Drama*, HighBridge Audio, 2007, CD. All subsequent quotations of the radio drama are from this unabridged CD version.



of mercy” solicits a laugh from his inferior officer, implying that Imperial forces do not see her as a threat: training their weapons on her ship is merely standard procedure, even a comical one—especially given her association with what Darth Vader calls a “mercy mission” in *A New Hope*.

Leia, however, is just as feisty in the radio series as she is in the movie, as she immediately demands to speak to Tion by comlink. After identifying herself as “*the* Princess Leia Organa,” she asks, “Who is responsible for this outrage?” When Tion flirtatiously replies, “A delight to hear your voice again, Your Highness,” Leia ignores his personal overtures and exclaims, “I demand an explanation for this, Lord Tion.” She will be neither flattered nor distracted by his efforts to court her. Tion insists that he would be honored to explain; he patronizingly offers to send his personal landspeeder for her. But Leia rejects it, asserting, “My own is being lowered now.” Leia’s assertiveness during this conversation unsettles Tion’s subordinate officer, who insists that she “has no grounds for objection; our mission on Ralltiir has been sanctioned by the Emperor himself.” Tion replies, “I’m not worried about legalities. I shall now have the privilege of placating a most attractive and influential young woman.” Tion ignores Leia’s moral outrage, reducing her to her age, looks, and social position; to him, she is just a young, beautiful, marriageable heiress. The idea that he will placate her suggests that he sees her as little more than a pampered princess, someone he subsequently calls “the shining jewel in the Organa crown,” and one who can be easily soothed and manipulated.

Leia’s assertiveness, however, only goes so far in extricating her from Imperial hands. Doubting her assertion that she is delivering “medical supplies and spare parts” to Ralltiir, first Tion and then Darth Vader threaten to search her ship. Since the *Tantive* is actually carrying “combat-type medipacks and three surgical field stations” along with “spare parts and power units suitable for military equipment,” Leia must outwit her adversaries to prevent discovery. When Tion is called away in response to a nearby rebel attack, Leia reminds Vader that legally only Tion, and not Vader, has the authority to search the *Tantive*. Vader agrees and leaves to find him so that they can discover what she is concealing. When Leia learns that Tion has installed a surveillance system that will be operational momentarily, she uses the system to allow him to overhear her tell Antilles, the *Tantive*’s captain, that she is interested in Tion but doubts his sincerity. She will only know that he is a true gentleman, and therefore worthy of her interest, if he allows her to leave without searching her vessel. He falls for it. Leia’s assertive interactions with Tion and Vader along with her successful manipulation of the former demonstrates that she is much more than Rubey’s

damself in distress. *TRD* suggests that, when confronted by Imperial forces, she is able to think quickly to avoid discovery and capture.

Throughout this initial scene, Leia uses wits rather than violence against the Empire, but the scene also initiates her shift from a philosophy of rebellion as a primarily pacifist humanitarianism to one that embraces violent resistance. During her conversation with Tion, Leia asks why the Empire has suspended the rule of law. Tion explains, "When peace and stability are threatened, it is the Emperor's duty to intervene, to secure his subjects' security and well-being." Leia is incredulous: "Well-being? They're the ones you're arresting!" She specifically objects to the Empire's use of "impressment gangs and interrogation centers" and nearly exposes her alignment with the Rebellion during her argument over the Empire's injustice. Rather than meekly accept Tion's assumption that the entire planet must be purified of its Rebel sympathies, she questions the ethics of imprisoning and torturing innocent bystanders. She pushes the boundaries of what one can say with impunity, but she does not act to transgress those boundaries publicly. She is still a pacifist, but the experience on Ralltiir has a profound effect on her.

When Leia returns to Alderaan, she does not report immediately to her father, named Prestor in the radio play. Instead, she walks from the spaceport to the palace, a full day's journey, since, as she tells him, "I had some thinking to do." Leia's walk through the countryside leads her to a political epiphany. When her father asks why she's been "doing all this soul-searching," Leia explains: "Father, people on Ralltiir have been chased from their homes, penned up like animals, executed without trial. Torture chambers are set up everywhere; they call them interrogation centers." When Prestor notes that this is the "usual Imperial procedure" and that "you're lucky to get off with your life," Leia relates the conclusion of her soul-searching: "It's time Alderaan stopped resisting the Empire and started fighting it!"

This assertion marks Leia's transition from a pacifist to someone willing to kill in the name of freedom. It horrifies her father, who insists, "Violence and warfare nearly destroyed us during the Clone Wars." But Leia now questions "what good [does] ... Alderaan's not having a single weapon" do and she suggests that she is prepared to kill: "I didn't start this—the Empire did. I want only to stop it, Father!" While the Alderaanian government, represented by its monarch, does not sanction violence and has banned the use of weapons, Leia's firsthand observation of the Empire's cruelty has convinced her that she must move from the passive resistance of merely providing humanitarian and military support, of standing by while others risk their lives, to a consideration of whether to take up arms and fight violence with violence. In short: she is now willing to shoot first.

The opportunity to fight—and kill, if necessary—quickly presents itself. Lord Tion soon appears at her father's court and attempts to press his suit of marriage by bragging about his military experience and status within the Imperial Army. The audience hears him enter the next scene while laughing as he continues a conversation begun offstage:

Now I'll tell you something about these traitors and terrorists who call themselves rebels and freedom fighters. They don't truly understand war. The fools on that particular planet actually thought that the Empire would negotiate with a pack of fanatics. So when these so-called resistance leaders showed up to parley, we locked the doors from the outside and torched the building!

This speech is delivered as if it were a funny anecdote. Tion laughs at the tale's end and Prestor plays along and also pretends to find it humorous. But Leia does not. She becomes increasingly angry. In her disgust at Tion's vision of "an Empire wallowing in blood and death" and "a galaxy of slaves," Leia accidentally betrays knowledge of the Death Star. Tion immediately catches her mistake and realizes that this finally proves her connection to the Rebellion. When he pulls out his blaster, Leia wrestles him for control over the weapon, which discharges, killing Tion. In contrast to Tion's earlier image of her as a pampered princess, Leia acts decisively when confronted with danger. Although she admits, "I hadn't meant for the blaster to hit him," Leia's decision to fight stands out. She is now willing to risk her life to support the Rebellion and to oppose the Empire's immoral oppression. She boards the *Tantive* once again and leaves to intercept the Death Star's plans, find Obi-Wan Kenobi, and return both to the Rebel base. These scenes in the radio play thus do more than add to the storyworld's established narrative; they expand Leia's character, reinforcing the image of Leia as a strong, independent woman who embodies the radio play's theme of the necessity of using violence to end the Empire's oppression.

As we have seen, Leia is subsequently captured, which leads to the third new scene featuring Leia: her torture by Vader aboard the Death Star. This scene also contributes to the way in which *TRD* casts Leia at the center of its exploration of when one is justified in using violence. While the film stops short of showing her interrogation, *TRD*'s eighth episode explicitly portrays it. The scene begins with Leia's usual tactic of appearing in control, demanding that she "be released from this cell and given access to formal legal proceedings!" As the "interrogation device," as Vader calls it, is heard entering the room, Leia insists that the "torture robot ... violates every rule of

law,” but Vader cuts her off, declaring “The law no longer applies to you! You’re a Rebel, and you’ve refused your one chance for mercy.” As in past scenes, Leia’s initial impulse is to challenge the legality of the Empire’s actions. When rhetoric does not work, she physically resists. In this instance, Vader must hold her still so the device can inject her with a serum. But both forms of resistance—rhetorical and physical—fail. Leia cannot escape. Nevertheless, she persists in refusing to provide Vader with the location of the Rebel base. He tries to convince her that he, too, is a rebel. He appeals to her sense of duty, insisting that her father “commands you to tell us” and asking, “Don’t you wish to please your father?” But this also fails to persuade her, so Vader uses the Force to make her feel “great pain, excruciating pain, ... a universe of it!” Suggesting that her heart is about to burst and that she cannot breathe, Vader takes her almost to the point of death before relenting. But even while screaming in pain, Leia would rather die than reveal the location of the rebel base. When Tarkin subsequently expresses incredulity that Leia, “that slip of a girl,” has defied Vader’s interrogation methods, Vader responds, “I believe that she still holds hope that the stolen plans will eventually be delivered into Rebel hands. Futile, of course, but it sustains her.” Tarkin rejects this explanation, noting that Vader has broken “hardened, resolute men with relative ease.” Tarkin is right to doubt Vader’s justification. Leia’s development in *TRD* provides the better explanation for her successful resistance: she is now ready to kill and to die to defeat the Empire. It is her clarity of purpose, her belief that violent resistance is an ethical response to the Empire’s oppression, that has transformed her from the woman of high birth who uses her privilege to hide her pacifist support for the Rebellion into a stalwart rebel ready to die or even kill to save the galaxy.

NPR’s *Star Wars: The Radio Drama* tells its audience the story of how this “slip of a girl” transforms into a Rebel leader willing to shoot first. It casts her as much more than a damsel in distress. She is a dynamic character who undertakes her own moral journey when she sees that passive resistance will not stop the Empire’s totalitarian oppression of the galaxy. She matures into an adult who must make moral choices concerning life and death. Ultimately, Leia embraces violence as an ethical response to the evil perpetrated by the Emperor and his totalitarian military machine. *TRD* achieves this expansion of Leia’s character using only sound. By framing Leia’s transformation from pacifist to revolutionary, however, in a character-building plot unique to the radio drama, with the familiar soundscape of *A New Hope*, *TRD* demonstrates that radio can add incredible depth and complexity to a transmedia franchise.



### 3. From Sequel to Quasi-Novelization

#### *Splinter of the Mind's Eye* and the 1970s Culture of Transmedia Contingency

Matthew Freeman

The transmedia phenomenon is a common and perhaps all-too-familiar strategy in Hollywood's contemporary blockbuster fiction factory, so often tied up with corporate notions of brand-building, "cash nexuses,"<sup>1</sup> and the use of intellectual property as a "marketing assault."<sup>2</sup> Yet, the history of the Star Wars franchise paints a slightly different picture, one that points to a far more independent model of what is now deemed transmedia storytelling. Though the industrial history of transmedia storytelling has been traced to the dawn of the twentieth century,<sup>3</sup> the early construction and expansion of the Star Wars storyworld in the late 1970s encapsulates a number of the developments and—notably—challenges now associated with the telling of stories across multiple media.

This chapter uses Alan Dean Foster's *Splinter of the Mind's Eye*—a rarely discussed novel commissioned by George Lucas as a low-budget, "Plan B" sequel to 1977's *A New Hope* should that film have struggled commercially—as a lens through which to theorize the challenges faced by independent transmedia storytellers working on the New Hollywood scene of the late 1970s. This was a very different period to the conglomerate-fronted transmedia franchises that are so often privileged in transmedia scholarship.<sup>4</sup> The chapter builds on the work of Kristin Fast and Henrik Örnebring by emphasizing "the many disjunctions and contradictions that almost inevitably follow when extending transmedia worlds across/

1 Jay Lemke, "Critical Analysis across Media: Games, Franchises, and the New Cultural Order." Paper presented at the *First International Conference on Critical Discourse Analysis*, Valencia, University of Valencia, May 12-14 2004.

2 David Alpert and Rick Jacobs, "Videogames and Licensing in the Hollywood Film Market." Paper presented at the *Korea Games Conferences*, Korea, October 16, 2004.

3 Matthew Freeman, *Historicising Transmedia Storytelling: Early Twentieth-Century Transmedia Story Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

4 See Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006); Carlos A. Scolari, "Transmedia Storytelling: Implicit Consumers, Narrative Worlds, and Branding in Contemporary Media Production," *International Journal of Communication* 3 (2009): 586-606; Elizabeth Evans, *Transmedia Television: Audiences, New Media, and Daily Life* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

between media.”<sup>5</sup> I argue for a similarly “contingent” understanding of transmedia storytelling by pointing to the unstable culture of contingency that characterized Lucas’s transmedia world-building of the era. Establishing *Splinter of the Mind Eye* as a precedent for many of the key questions surrounding transmedia storytelling today, this chapter will delve into the central contextual factors of the 1970s Hollywood film industry, highlighting the importance of seemingly contradictory versions of filmmaking on the development of Star Wars as a transmedia storyworld. I also analyze the narrative and paratextual features of *Splinter of the Mind Eye* as a transmedia Star Wars text, teasing out relationships between levels of profitability and the conflicting transmedia potentials that those levels engendered in the late 1970s.

## Characterizing Transmedia Production

Since its cinematic debut in 1977, Star Wars has grown into a vast transmedial franchise, spread out across multiple platforms including novels, magazines, comic books, video games, radio plays, and more. Luke Skywalker’s heroic journey may have reached a natural conclusion upon defeating the Empire at the end of *Return of the Jedi*, but the world of Star Wars lived on for a new wave of future adventures. Industrially speaking, the models, strategies, and mechanics by which this storyworld expanded across media have also been diverse. It is therefore important to characterize the general tendencies of transmedia production. Elsewhere I have argued that different industrial configurations have characterized transmedia storytelling practices over time, emphasizing that emerging practices in modern advertising, licensing, and cross-sector industry partnerships amidst times of social change and conflict presented varied ways of building storyworlds across media.<sup>6</sup> Media industries are defined by ever-changing conditions and, as these conditions shifted over time, the models of transmedia storytelling have been reconfigured accordingly. Transmedia storytelling was initially theorized as “a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically

5 Kristin Fast and Henrik Örnebring, “Transmedia World-building: *The Shadow* (1931-present) and *Transformers* (1984-present),” *The International Journal of Cultural Studies* (2015): 2, accessed March 25, 2017, doi: 10.1177/1367877915605887.

6 Freeman, *Historicising Transmedia Storytelling*.

across multiple delivery channels,”<sup>7</sup> and, in turn, understood for the most part as a coordinated system of convergence-driven media production that establishes a “new synergy amongst media companies and industries.”<sup>8</sup> It is indeed true that modern convergences have fortified transmedia storytelling to gain greater urgency in the present moment, as media producers now make use of a host of internal corporate interconnections and digital platforms.

However, this urgency has not necessarily resulted in a media landscape wherein stories always unfold fluently as continuities “across multiple platforms, with each medium making distinctive contributions to our understanding of the world.”<sup>9</sup> Instead, transmedia storytelling is often a messy system of contingencies, alternatives, and reboots. Fast and Örnebring argue that, rather than limiting conceptions of transmedia storytelling to “*planned, strategic* aspects of creation,” it is equally important to “emphasize the many disjunctions and contradictions that almost inevitably follow when extending transmedia worlds across/between media.”<sup>10</sup> Here, the focus is on “the *emergent* (as opposed to planned) nature of the narrative aspects of transmediality.”<sup>11</sup> The rationale behind Fast and Örnebring’s thinking and this push to understanding transmedia storytelling in terms of the accrued characteristics that are more ad hoc/contingent than planned is based on the fact that transmedia storyworlds are often created over many years by multiple parties and with a lack of certainty over future production plans.

Although this chapter emphasizes the media-industrial period of the late 1970s, even today’s industrial convergences arguably facilitate narrative expansions of storyworlds that are indeed based on more ad-hoc developments. That is to say: today’s industrial convergences often breed a model of transmediality that is based on multiplicity. As Henry Jenkins puts it, a model of transmediality based on multiplicity “routinely uses alternate versions of characters or parallel universe versions of their stories to reward mastery over the source material.”<sup>12</sup> While Jenkins is right to

7 “‘We Had So Many Stories to Tell’: The Heroes Comics as Transmedia Storytelling,” *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*, accessed April 14, 2016, [http://henryjenkins.org/2007/12/we\\_had\\_so\\_many\\_stories\\_to\\_tell.html](http://henryjenkins.org/2007/12/we_had_so_many_stories_to_tell.html).

8 James Hay and Nick Couldry, “Rethinking Convergence/Culture: An Introduction,” *Cultural Studies* 25:4 (2011): 473.

9 Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 336.

10 Fast and Örnebring, “Transmedia World-building,” 2.

11 Fast and Örnebring, “Transmedia World-building,” 2.

12 Henry Jenkins, “Transmedia 202: Further Reflections,” *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*, accessed December 21, 2016, [http://henryjenkins.org/2011/08/defining\\_transmedia\\_further\\_re.html](http://henryjenkins.org/2011/08/defining_transmedia_further_re.html).



classify transmedia storytelling as “entertainment for the age of media convergence,”<sup>13</sup> it is also fair to say that under this contemporary system of industrial convergence, transmedia storyworlds are now in the hands of so many different stakeholders, working across multiple subdivisions and subsidiaries (and farmed out to different consultancy companies and marketing agencies) that their transmedial constructions (e.g. their world-building directions, character developments, or use of given platforms) come with a sense of contingency that is dependent on profitability.

Indeed, because of the highly collaborative and hierarchical structures under which today’s fast-moving media conglomerates must operate—without guaranteeing substantial profits from expensive productions—industrial convergence does not always work to extend fictional storyworlds across media as systematic story continuities so much as this model sometimes works to start and end various continuities over and over again. Jenkins acknowledges this multiplicity himself, noting that transmedia storytelling’s “high level of coordination and creative control [...] is hard enough to achieve [even] across the multiple divisions of the same production team.”<sup>14</sup> Even when today’s media conglomerates revive a storyworld with great fanfare—as Time Warner did with Superman in *Superman Returns* (2006) and then again in *Man of Steel* (2013)—they are often loose echoes of older iterations.

My point, then, is a simple one. This chapter will show how differences in outlook and strategy for building transmedia worlds—either as planned creations wherein a story is systematically dispersed or as ad-hoc narrative additions based on contingency—were shaped by the industrial logics of late-1970s Hollywood, a situation that has now come full circle.

## New Hollywood in the 1970s

Geoff King, in his characterization of the New Hollywood circa the late 1960s and 1970s, identifies two versions of the Hollywood film at that time.<sup>15</sup> The first version, the Hollywood Renaissance film, denotes a time in the American film industry’s history best exemplified by the appearance and success of films such as *Bonnie and Clyde* (1967), *The Graduate* (1967), and *Easy Rider* (1969). As King explains, “it is remembered as an era in which

13 Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 97.

14 Jenkins, “Transmedia 202.”

15 Geoff King, *New Hollywood Cinema: An Introduction*. London: I.B. Tauris, 2002.

Hollywood produced a relatively high number of innovative films that seemed to go beyond the confines of conventional studio fare in terms of their content and style and their existence as products of a purely commercial or corporate system."<sup>16</sup> It was a time when the "exploitation" films of the 1950s (biker films, youth pictures, horror, etc.) crossed over into the Hollywood mainstream as critically and commercially successful "art films, or something very like it."<sup>17</sup> Importantly, these Renaissance films were often characterized by initially short or limited theatrical releases, with a sense of almost uncalculated contingency over how successful such a film could become.

King's second version of the New Hollywood film is the blockbuster, a form of cinema exemplified by *Jaws* (1975) and characterized by pre-sold properties, big-budget productions, and tentpole pictures based on mass appeal.<sup>18</sup> The rise of the blockbuster opened up Hollywood to a "world of corporate cross-media control" and the "intensive multimedia and merchandising exploitation favored by the corporate giants that took shape in the 1980s,"<sup>19</sup> a mediascape from which *Star Wars* is often understood to have emerged.<sup>20</sup>

Nevertheless, rather than assessing the era of New Hollywood filmmaking as purely polarized extremes, we can understand the history of transmedia storytelling during this time, at least in the case of *Star Wars*, as being a complex combination of both the Renaissance and the blockbuster models. Fundamentally, both of these seemingly opposite styles transformed what was once deemed lesser or more exploitative genre fare into something else. By this, I mean the transformation of previously "independent" or "underground" genres such as the biker film into *Easy Rider* (1969), a countercultural production for a major studio, or the transformation of low-budget horror works into glossy, high-budget blockbusters such as *The Exorcist* (1973) and *The Omen* (1976). The 1970s also introduced a shift towards directorial authorship as a brand or pronounced mark of quality, as the first generation of film school-educated directors like Francis Ford Coppola, Martin Scorsese, and George Lucas rose to prominence. Both of

16 King, *New Hollywood Cinema*, 13.

17 King, *New Hollywood Cinema*, 13.

18 King, *New Hollywood Cinema*, 49–84.

19 King, *New Hollywood Cinema*, 81.

20 See Will Brooker, *Using the Force: Creativity, Community and Star Wars Fans* (New York: Continuum, 2002); William Proctor and Matthew Freeman, "'The First Step into a Smaller World': The Transmedia Economy of *Star Wars*," in *Revisiting Imaginary Worlds: A Subcreation Studies Anthology*, ed. Mark J. P. Wolf (New York: Routledge, 2016).

these factors became important to Star Wars and its transmedial sprawl in different ways, both in terms of the importance of Lucas's authorship over how the storyworld expanded across media and in terms of the growing mass appetite for science fiction in the mainstream multiplexes. Additionally, nostalgic returns to the past were culturally prominent throughout the New Hollywood era—and, as *Variety* observed in its review, *A New Hope* drew on and revived older forms of Hollywood entertainment, “including Flash Gordon serials, Errol Flynn adventures, and the family-oriented entertainment of Walt Disney.”<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, it was the aforementioned trait of producing low-budget, word-of-mouth-driven films with limited releases—that is, a culture of contingency and uncertainty—that was as important to Star Wars's transmedial evolution as the more apparent influence of the rise of the blockbuster and its culture of planned cross-media strategization. Indeed, the early days of the Star Wars universe demonstrate a complex dialectic between these two versions of Hollywood. This understanding of transmedia storytelling as an intricate and murky dialectic between corporate strategy and low-budget contingency is exemplified by the Star Wars novel *Splinter of the Mind's Eye*.

## A Product of the Times

*Splinter of the Mind's Eye* (hereafter *Splinter*), written by Alan Dean Foster, was published in 1978, shortly after the release of *A New Hope* a year prior. The story sees Luke and Leia crash on a swampy, foggy planet and, after a few scrapes with the locals, they end up on a quest to find the crimson Kaiburr crystal, a mysterious artifact that can focus the Force and that is also being hunted by Darth Vader. Chris Taylor asserts that *Splinter* was intended to be adapted as a low-budget sequel if the original film flopped at the box office.<sup>22</sup> The novel thus might be understood as a kind of fallback option if Lucas's plan for a bigger-budget sequel proved impossible to realize. In other words, *Splinter* was something of a world-building contingency, existing neither as an entirely strategic expansion of the storyworld nor as a purely ad-hoc development. Rather, it fell somewhere in between these two models, a combination of the two—either a parallel universe with alternate versions of the characters' stories or a systematic dispersal of the characters

21 Frank James, “Film Review: *Star Wars*.” *Variety*, May 29, 1977.

22 Chris Taylor, *How Star Wars Conquered the Universe: The Past, Present, and Future of a Multibillion Dollar Franchise* (New York: Basic Books, 2015).

and their stories across media, depending on the ultimate profitability of the original film. Its conception can be understood as emerging partly from the “practice of generating highly successful big-budget sequels” that ascended during the rise of blockbuster cinema in the late 1970s and, simultaneously, partly out of that same era’s low-budget, artful genre storytelling that also characterized publishing.<sup>23</sup>

Consider, for example, the tension between artful genre storytelling and commercial cross-media strategy that pervades *The English Journal’s* review of *Splinter* in 1979. As was discussed in this publication’s “Books For Young Adults Book Pool” article, “science fiction books have become popular for the first time in several years,” a change that is credited to the New Hollywood: “Due to the stimulation of film, we feel more readers are trying science fiction for the first time to discover that they not only understand the language, they also enjoy the action.”<sup>24</sup> Notable in this publication’s positive response to *Splinter* is the way in which its readers were said to be “pleased with the film-book continuity” (“because many students had enjoyed *Star Wars*, they were eager to follow further adventures of Luke Skywalker, Artoo Detoo and See Threepio”) in a discourse that is highly typical of the logic of transmedia storytelling, but equally of the novel’s more artful reflection on social and scientific issues: “Some readers felt that ‘sooner or later Earth is going to deteriorate and we’ll have to live elsewhere—in that type of world.’”<sup>25</sup> The novel was reviewed and indeed often praised on account of its integration of both the Renaissance and the blockbuster models of New Hollywood cinema, suggesting that the workings of transmedia storytelling at the time revolved around an amalgamation of the New Hollywood’s two seemingly opposite faces.

## Sequel or Quasi-Novelization?

Of course, the novel’s industrial positioning as a product of low-budget contingencies, corporate blockbusters, and cross-media strategy raises problems in terms of how one categorizes and conceptualizes its status as a transmedia extension. In some ways, *Splinter* offers a systematic dispersal of

23 Peter Krämer, *The New Hollywood: From Bonnie and Clyde to Star Wars* (London: Wallflower Press, 2005), 92.

24 Michael Carlsen, et al., “Books For Young Adults Book Pool,” *The English Journal* 3:2 (1979): 77.

25 Carlsen, et al., “Books for Young Adults,” 77.

characters, stories, and a world across film and literature. Such an intention was emphasized on the book's cover: "From the further adventures of Luke Skywalker, based on the characters and situations created by George Lucas." As its author Alan Dean Foster also declares, the book's plot—revolving as it does around Luke and Leia heading for a planet that they want to recruit for the Rebel Alliance—"could have been filmed cheaply and then you stick it between Episode IV and V."<sup>26</sup> *Splinter* can therefore be categorized as a transmedia *sequel* in that sense—that is, telling the further adventures of the film's characters via another medium. Foster partly reinforces this intention himself in interview:

My contract was originally for a novelization of the first film and then a sequel book, because George—being a student of Disney, I'm sure—wanted more material in case the movie was a success. He wanted something out there that the hoped-for fans would be able to enjoy while he was busy making the second film.<sup>27</sup>

However, as much as Foster suggests here that *Splinter* was to work as a kind of transmedia sequel between the first film and the hoped-for second film, he also hints at both the novel's ad-hoc status as a contingency plan and, in other ways, as a kind of *quasi-novelization*. Examined through this particular lens, *Splinter* can be understood as expanding the Star Wars storyworld across media by way of transmedia adaptation. Moving away from Jenkins's, Elizabeth Evans's, and indeed Mark J.P. Wolf's assumptions that adaptation and transmedia storytelling are binaries—with the former being about "translation" and the latter about "growth"<sup>28</sup>—Christy Dena's argument that adaptation is a process that can be transmedial in nature is useful for our purposes. Linda Hutcheon argues that "fans of films enjoy their novelizations because they provide insights into the characters' thought processes and more details about their background."<sup>29</sup> Building on this idea, Dena—in reference to Powell and Pressburger's novelization of *The Red Shoes* (1948)—argues that,

26 Paul Kerr, "Star Wars Author Alan Dean Foster on Splinter of the Mind's Eye, The Sequel That Might Have Been" *Yahoo Movies*, March 16, 2015, accessed January 1, 2017, <https://www.yahoo.com/movies/star-wars-splinter-of-the-minds-eye-alan-dean-113794483282.html/>.

27 Kerr, "The Sequel That Might Have Been."

28 Mark J. P. Wolf, *Building Imaginary Worlds: The Theory and History of Subcreation* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 245–246.

29 Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 118.

While the novel closely follows the film, it also provided Powell and Pressburger with the opportunity to add new narrative threads and to expand upon the film's original themes and characters. They paid particular attention to the impresario Boris Lermontov, and to the development of the doomed relationship between Victoria Page and Julian Craster.<sup>30</sup>

Though it is certainly not the case that *Splinter* adds new narrative, world, or character development to the original film and thus does not work in the same way as Dena proposes of the relationship between films and their novelizations here, it is possible to think of Foster's novel as a novelization of the Star Wars world, if not of the film itself. In doing so, *Splinter* becomes a novelization that imagines the future of what the Star Wars story could be.

In other words, the creative choices made by Lucas and by Foster when developing *Splinter* afforded a variety of world-building possibilities. Those various possibilities were designed according to levels of profitability and the conflicting transmedia potentials that those levels engendered. For instance, Foster explains that "the only restriction placed on me was that the novel had to be filmable on a low budget. That's why I set it on a fog-shrouded planet. A lot of the action takes place in the fog or underground, which facilitates shooting with cheap backgrounds."<sup>31</sup> There is the sense of the "ad-hoc adaptation" about *Splinter*'s creative choices—its narrative focus driven by its suitability as a low-budget picture for the New Hollywood's Renaissance era rather than its suitability for the pages of a novel. Similarly, the character of Han Solo is notably omitted from the story for *Splinter*, a decision that was enforced upon Foster by Lucas because, as Foster explains himself, "At the time I was writing *Splinter*, Harrison Ford had not committed to any further participation in Star Wars. Hence I was specifically told not to use the Han Solo character. And without Han, it didn't seem logical to have Chewie in the book, either."<sup>32</sup> It is also noteworthy that *Splinter* originally opened with a fairly complex space battle that forces Luke and Leia down onto the planet of Mimban, but this was one of the revisions made on the basis that such a scene would have been expensive to film.

In some ways, then, *Splinter* was both a transmedia sequel and a quasi-novelization of a film that had not been made. However, in a narrative sense, *Splinter* worked to lay the groundwork for the architecture of the

30 Christy Dena, "Transmedia Practice: Theorising the Practice of Expressing a Fictional World across Distinct Media and Environments" (PhD diss., University of Sydney, 2009), 153.

31 Kerr, "The Sequel That Might Have Been."

32 Kerr, "The Sequel That Might Have Been."

alternatively imagined blockbuster film sequel. While Foster claims to “have no idea” whether Lucas borrowed from his novel the idea for the iconic, imagined lightsaber confrontation between Luke and Darth Vader on Dagobah in *The Empire Strikes Back*,<sup>33</sup> there is the sense that the way in which Luke fights off Vader and severs his arm in the pages of that novel had a kind of reverse impact on the film that followed it. Indeed, Foster’s book also presents Darth Vader leaping up in the air and shooting energy from his hands—abilities that the character and his Sith master, the Emperor, showed in later film sequels. Importantly, too, the novel’s swampy, fog-shrouded planet of Mimban might have inspired the production design for Dagobah.

## Conclusion

The transmediality of the Star Wars universe paints a particularly complex picture. Of course, by the time *Splinter* hit shelves in March 1978, the first Star Wars film was a phenomenon and Lucas therefore opted to take the story in a different direction for the next film. But Foster’s book remains an intriguing hint at where the Star Wars franchise could have gone, had Lucas adapted the book. More to the point, *Splinter* becomes a highly useful lens through which to consider the history of transmedia storytelling. Elsewhere, I have shown how transmedia storytelling during the early- to mid-twentieth century occupied the emergent (as opposed to planned) aspect of transmediality.<sup>34</sup> The reason for this ad-hoc formation of transmedia storytelling between 1900 and 1950 was quite simply because many of the strategies that underpinned how stories were told across media in the past were themselves emergent, with the likes of L. Frank Baum, Edgar Rice Burroughs, and DC Comics constantly reacting to new media-industrial developments.<sup>35</sup> In turn, I have shown in this chapter that the messiness that surrounds understandings of Foster’s Star Wars novel as a transmedia product of the late 1970s emerged directly out of the dialectical relationships between two models of New Hollywood filmmaking.

In effect, the equal dominance of both the low-budget genre film with a degree of contingency over its continued success and the emerging blockbuster film with its turn towards cross-media strategy worked together

33 Kerr, “The Sequel That Might Have Been.”

34 Freeman, *Historicising Transmedia Storytelling*.

35 Freeman, *Historicising Transmedia Storytelling*.



to inform the making of a Star Wars novel that encapsulated neither of those models entirely but rather parts of both. As part blockbuster strategy, *Splinter* re-engaged the Star Wars audience, strategically telling the next chapter of the story via another medium. As part low-budget contingency, it was a quasi-novelization for the future of a possible franchise, adding new ideas to a story or storyworld based on Renaissance picture budget necessities that, in this case, perhaps even worked to inform Star Wars's world-building alternatives going forward.

That being said, the progression of time did little to uncomplicate the status of Star Wars in terms of its continued transmedial organization. In the years that followed the release of both *Splinter* and the original trilogy, the films were supported by other novels, comic books, and cartoons—transmedial additions that became part of the EU. Occupying a position within this EU, for example, was Timothy Zahn's Thrawn trilogy, a series of novels set five years after the events of *Return of the Jedi*. But despite working to expand the storyworld and build its core characters, Zahn's Thrawn trilogy was not always promoted as a transmedia story in the planned and strategic sense. A discourse of separation between film and novel was even reinforced by Lucas himself in interviews. For *Cinescape*, Lucas once remarked,

There are two worlds here. There is my world, which is the movies, and there is this other world that has been created, which I say is the parallel universe—the licensing world of the books, games and comic books. They do not intrude on my world, which is a select period of time [...] I do not get too involved in the parallel universe.<sup>36</sup>

For an interview with *Starlog* magazine in 2005 Lucas reinforced this division of a “parallel world,” stating bluntly of the EU stories, “I do not read that stuff. That is a different world than my world [...] They try to make their universe as consistent with mine as possible, but obviously they get enthusiastic and go off in other directions.”<sup>37</sup> This later era of Star Wars history was typified by the building of “possible worlds”—telling tales that likely originate from some place of possible truth but ultimately without authorial authentication.<sup>38</sup>

36 Qtd. in “Canon,” *Wookieepedia*, accessed December 19, 2016, <http://starwars.wikia.com/wiki/Canon>.

37 Ian Spelling, “New Hopes,” *Starlog* 337 (August 2005): 46–48.

38 Matthew Freeman, “Re-Building Transmedia Star Wars: Strategies of Branding and Un-Branding a Galaxy Far, Far Away,” in *Disney's Star Wars: Forces of Production and Promotion*,



Similarly, the complexity surrounding *Splinter*'s transmedial status suggests that transmedia storytelling is not simply about either forming strategic, coherent expansions or ad-hoc additions, nor is it simply about producing binary models that can be labelled as continuity or as multiplicity. Rather, during the late 1970s at least, transmedia storytelling occurred as a complex interplay between different models of filmmaking and other related contingencies of profitability that afforded a wide range of possibilities for telling many kinds of Star Wars stories.

## 4. Another Canon, Another Time

### The Novelizations of the Star Wars Films

*Thomas Van Parys*

It was not written in the stars that a small novel based on an eclectic film screenplay and ghostwritten as work-for-hire would have such an impact on the process and practice of adapting films into novels. Thanks to the film's box-office success, the novelization of *A New Hope* (1976) has arguably had a major influence on film novelizations as a genre. When David Seltzer's *The Omen* (1976) unexpectedly became a financial hit and went to the #1 spot in the United States, book publishers realized that, in addition to functioning as a marketing tool, novelizations could be bestsellers in their own right. Thus, while novelizations have been around since the birth of cinema, the arrival of Star Wars cemented their institutionalization in Hollywood. That is, to the extent that this was not yet the case, the practice of novelizing the latest potential blockbuster hit became an established part of film marketing and media franchising. Moreover, the amount and visibility of science-fiction novelizations increased as science-fiction cinema boomed, while in the tie-in market, science-fiction novelizations became more prominent because more films were increasingly based on original screenplays, in contrast with the many adaptations from book to film that took place in the 1950s and 1960s.

The novelization of *A New Hope* and the ensuing Star Wars novelizations and franchise novels<sup>1</sup> also had lasting effects on science-fiction literature, as original science-fiction novels now had to contend with the success of the innumerable spin-off novels of various franchises, to the dismay of many science-fiction authors and critics. Science-fiction cinema was long considered inferior to science-fiction literature, due to the supposed mediocrity of its ideas; science-fiction novelizations therefore constituted the bottom of the barrel. James Gunn even contends that science-fiction films “translated into written form, would be unpublishable because of lack

1 See Sean Guynes's chapter in this volume on the media-industrial history of Star Wars franchise novels.

of logic or originality,” regardless of “the success of the novelized versions of a variety of SF [science-fiction] films, including *A New Hope* and its sequels.”<sup>2</sup>

Throughout its history, the novelization has had a double goal: it is both promotional material for the film and a prolongation of the film experience to capitalize on its (potential) success. A novelization can function as a spoiler (before the film viewing) and as an expansion or elaboration (after the film viewing). Fans may want to read a novelization to access extras, such as character elaborations or altered, extended, and deleted sequences, which are fixtures of novelizations since they are usually based on an early version of the shooting script.

In this chapter, I focus on how the novelizations of the seven main Star Wars films,<sup>3</sup> which I will discuss in publication order, add to the world-building of the transmedia universe. I argue that they largely evolve from minimal and faithful reworkings of the screenplay to explanatory elaborations that occasionally provide key insights into character motivations. This also reflects how the contexts of the different film productions influenced individual novelizers’ approaches: perhaps paradoxically, as the Star Wars transmedia franchise is developed over time, Lucasfilm has exerted greater control over Star Wars literature, yet at the same time, novelizers have been given more leeway. The novelizations also display self-awareness of their transmedial function within the Star Wars mega-text by mythologizing the narrative and connecting with the previous films and even with earlier novels. In this way, they draw attention to their double status as novelizations and chapters of a serialized story.

2 James E. Gunn, “The Tinsel Screen,” in *Projections: Science Fiction in Literature and Film*, ed. Lou Anders (Austin, TX: MonkeyBrain Books, 2004), 45.

3 These seven novels are obviously not the only novelizations of the films. For the original trilogy, other publications include storybooks (adapted by Geraldine Richelson, Shep Steneman, and Joan D. Vinge, respectively and collected in *Star Wars—The First Ten Years: Movie Storybook Trilogy*), Step-Up Movie Adventure books (*A New Hope* and *The Empire Strikes Back* adapted by Larry Weinberg, *Return of the Jedi* by Elizabeth Levy), and even “Book and Record” sets (“SEE the pictures, HEAR the record, READ the book”). The most curious tie-ins are perhaps the Special Young Readers’ Edition novelizations, which are basically edited-down, rather than rewritten, versions of the original novelizations. These novels are virtually identical—same format, similar cover—only shorter. In 2004, Scholastic retroactively published original junior novelizations by Ryder Windham to coincide with the original trilogy’s DVD release. For the prequel trilogy, a similar range of books exists: Scholastic published junior novelizations written by Patricia Wrede and, in 2017, Disney released “Read-Along Storybook and CD” sets. Further engaging a younger interactive audience, the *The Phantom Menace* journals and the *Star Wars Adventures* book series, which includes regular novels alongside corresponding game books, contain partial novelizations of *The Phantom Menace* as well.

## *A New Hope*

Publishing Star Wars spin-off novels was a franchising strategy from the beginning. As part of publicity supervisor Charles Lippincott's marketing plan, a deal was made with Ballantine Books for the publication of five Star Wars books: two novels, two "making of" books, and a calendar.<sup>4</sup> Published as *Star Wars: From the Adventures of Luke Skywalker* with a cover design by Ralph McQuarrie, the novelization of *A New Hope* first appeared in December 1976, five months before the film was released. This pre-release was partially due to a shift in the film's release date and partially because Lippincott wanted science-fiction fans to get to know the story and spread the word. The paperback hit the bestseller list and its print run of 250,000 copies sold out by February. In other words, the novelization was not just a book that benefited from the popularity of the film; in its own way, it contributed to that success. According to Ballantine, 3.5 million copies were sold in three months,<sup>5</sup> making it the fourth biggest bestseller in America.

Famously, the novel is credited to George Lucas, but was in fact ghostwritten by Alan Dean Foster. Foster is recognized by fans and the publishing industry as the novelizer *par excellence*, always mentioned first in any list. Given his reputation, it is not surprising that he has the highest number of hit science-fiction film novelizations to his name. "If you do something and it sells umpteen zillion copies, then the next person who comes along will look to you as a logical choice to possibly sell umpteen zillion copies of their book," Foster says.<sup>6</sup> Among many other novelizations, he wrote *Alien* (1979), *The Thing* (1981), *Transformers* (2007), *Terminator: Salvation* (2009), and *Star Trek* (2009). He is also the author of many franchise novels that build upon the worlds of those films, most famously *Splinter of the Mind's Eye* (1978), a semi-novelization-turned-sequel to *A New Hope* that was part of the Ballantine book deal (see Matthew Freeman's chapter in this volume).

Hired by Judy Lynn Del Rey, editor of Ballantine's science-fiction line, Foster's experience on *A New Hope*'s novelization was a happy one; Foster had a brief meeting with George Lucas and thought "he was the nicest man I've ever worked with in the movie business."<sup>7</sup> Despite this line of communication between director and novelizer, the novel is a prototypical

4 Chris Taylor, *How Star Wars Conquered the Universe: The Past, Present, and Future of a Multibillion Dollar Franchise* (New York: Basic Books, 2015), 158-160.

5 David Pringle, "SF, Fantasy & Horror Movie Novelizations," *Interzone* 80 (1994): 40.

6 Randall D. Larson, *Films into Books: An Analytical Bibliography of Film Novelizations, Movie, and TV Tie-Ins* (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1995), 141.

7 Larson, *Films into Books*, 142.

example of the commercial novelization, in that it sticks closely to the screenplay, offers minimal extra characterization, features a third-person omniscient narrator with many displacements of focus and sudden cuts to new paragraphs, and tells the story concisely. In this way, Foster set the template for the novelizations of the original trilogy, which are adaptations mostly placed outside the production context of the films and basically limited to transcriptions of the screenplays, with occasional additions.

In this novelization, the most significant bonus is the short prologue, which effectively mythologizes the story. Presented as an excerpt “From the First Saga/*Journal of the Whills*”—which Lucas was originally going to use to connect his Star Wars universe to our world—and accompanied by a quote ascribed to Leia Organa of Alderaan, Senator (“They were in the wrong place at the wrong time. Naturally they became heroes.”<sup>8</sup>), the prologue briefly recounts the background to *A New Hope*. As Lucasfilm’s Pablo Hidalgo points out, “[f]or decades, this 362-word introduction served as the only real insight into the events potentially covered in Episodes I, II, and III,”<sup>9</sup> and it already embeds into the story the politics for which the prequel trilogy would later be so heavily criticized by fans.

In this prologue, Emperor Palpatine “was controlled by the very assistants and boot-lickers he had appointed to high office” instead of the other way around, and it is the Imperial bureaucrats that had “exterminated through treachery and deception the Jedi Knights.”<sup>10</sup> As this was written before Star Wars became a phenomenon and an expansive storyworld, there are bound to be surprising differences, from how the story would develop to now famous lines (e.g. “I have a very strange feeling about this”<sup>11</sup>) and so on. For the opening sentence, Foster replaced “A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away” with “Another galaxy, another time,”<sup>12</sup> arguably missing the point of Lucas’s line, which goes counter to expectation by setting the narrative explicitly in the past. However, from a certain point of view, the Star Wars novelizations are set in yet another galaxy than the films, as we shall see. In some ways, they enrich both the Star Wars universe and the films; in other ways they are hybrid, anachronistic objects that do not always rhyme with that universe and never constitute fully fledged texts on their own—now as well as then.

8 George Lucas, *Star Wars* (London: Sphere Books Limited, 1977), 6.

9 Pablo Hidalgo, *Star Wars: The Essential Reader’s Companion* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2012), 182.

10 Lucas, *Star Wars*, 5.

11 Lucas, *Star Wars*, 112.

12 Lucas, *Star Wars*, 5.

## *The Empire Strikes Back*

The novelization of *The Empire Strikes Back* (1980) was written by Donald F. Glut, a friend of George Lucas's at film school and originally the first to be asked to write *A New Hope*'s novelization. But Glut had refused because the pay was low, there were no royalties, and Twentieth Century Fox wanted Lucas's name on the cover. The novelization of *The Empire Strikes Back* was released a week in advance of the film and sold three million copies.<sup>13</sup> Glut's novelization experience was rather less positive than Foster's, as Lucasfilm's policy of secrecy and control around the production of the sequel hindered his writing:

"Some people could look at the scripts but not see the artwork; some people could see the artwork but not the scripts. They literally locked me inside a trailer with all the McQuarrie paintings." He made sketches in a notebook and remembered showing an employee one sketch when he came out. "Is this Yoda?" Glut asked. The employee threw his hands over his eyes. "Don't tell me! I don't want to know."<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, in the novel, Yoda has long white hair on his "blue-skinned head,"<sup>15</sup> which matches early concept art of the character.<sup>16</sup> It is also clear that Glut's interpretation of the Han Solo character is different from Harrison Ford's portrayal. Since he did not have access to any film footage, Glut "was worried that the book would be a lot different than the movie and would offend a lot of readers": "all I had to go by, as far as the mood and the visual style, was the first film. So I tried to apply what I remembered from the first film to the novel of the second film."<sup>17</sup>

In a sense, this novel may be regarded as a double adaptation—with the story and dialogue novelized from the script and most of the visual imagery adapted from the previous film and McQuarrie's concept art. At the beginning of the novel, Glut explicitly references *A New Hope* a few times, effectively recapping the previous film:

13 Taylor, *How Star Wars Conquered the Universe*, 238.

14 Taylor, *How Star Wars Conquered the Universe*, 238.

15 Donald F. Glut, *The Empire Strikes Back* (London: Sphere Books Limited, 1980), 101.

16 Hidalgo, *Star Wars: The Essential Reader's Companion*, 238.

17 Larson, *Films into Books*, 153.

The job had seemed simple enough: just pilot Ben Kenobi, plus young Luke and two droids, to the Alderaan system. How could Han have known at the time that he would also be called on to rescue a princess from the Empire's most feared battle station, the Death Star?<sup>18</sup>

Indicating how novelizers do not just transcribe the screenplay but draw on different sources and media (such as conversations with the director, previous film installments, artwork, publicity photos, and so on), these examples reinforce the evolution of Star Wars from an individual story to a serialized story universe. The novelization also ends with a prefiguration of *Return of the Jedi*'s plot: "[Luke] only knew he had to return to Yoda and finish his training before he set off to rescue Han."<sup>19</sup>

Whereas other novels might include small bonuses for fans with insight into events or characters, Glut does not offer much additional interpretation. This may be traced back to the novelization's production constraints, but ironically, the main reason for the film producers' paranoia—Darth Vader's identity as Luke's father—would indeed be given away beforehand by the novelization itself.

### *Return of the Jedi*

For the novelization of *Return of the Jedi* (1983), author James Kahn was not allowed much "literary freedom"<sup>20</sup> either. With additional character backgrounds being rejected, Kahn had to follow the screenplay closely, more so for *Return of the Jedi* than for other novelizations. The following quote may be read as subtle metafictional commentary on the restrictions of the novelizer's job:

This did not scan at all. Someone had obviously mislaid the correct program. Nonetheless, *he* was only a *droid*, his functions well delineated. Translation only, no free will *please*. He shook his head and continued.<sup>21</sup>

In another instance, Kahn virtually makes fun of the (heavily criticized) twist that Leia turns out to be Luke's sister:

18 Glut, *The Empire Strikes Back*, 7.

19 Glut, *The Empire Strikes Back*, 215.

20 Larson, *Films into Books*, 173.

21 James Kahn, *Return of the Jedi* (London: Futura, 1983), 42.

Pawn in a castle conspiracy? Cribs mixed, siblings switched and parted and whisked away to different secret lives? Impossible. He knew who he was! He was Luke Skywalker.<sup>22</sup>

It is, in fact, not unusual for novelizers to insert the occasional comment on filmic logic or the film's plot. As these examples illustrate, the constraints of the novelization are countered with a literary style that can be described as more specific, adult, self-conscious, humorous, and at times metaphorical. What is more, Kahn elaborates throughout on characters' motivations and the thoughts behind their actions. In this way, by systematically providing access to the characters' reflections, Kahn also makes both Luke's near-seduction to the dark side and the redemption of Darth Vader more plausible than in the film:

Luke didn't bury the thought, this time; he gloried in it. He engorged himself with its juices, felt its power tingle his cheeks. It made him feverish, this thought, with lust so overpowering as to totally obliterate all other considerations.<sup>23</sup>

Kahn tries to find the logic behind every question that might arise from the film's story and plot.

In a sense, the increased focus on character development and plot consistency may be the main reason for fans to read this particular novelization. On the one hand, the novel provides an alternative, expanded experience with a couple of "Easter eggs" thrown in; the multiple references to the Star Wars mega-text, which are always functional here in terms of characterization, are part of that:

And so Senator Palpatine had seized the moment. Through fraud, clever promises, and astute political maneuvering, he'd managed to get himself elected head of the Council. And then through subterfuge, bribery and terror, he'd named himself Emperor.<sup>24</sup>

The novel also provides the first clue to how Anakin Skywalker transformed into Darth Vader: "Memories of molten lava, crawling up his back ... no."<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Kahn, *Return of the Jedi*, 65.

<sup>23</sup> Kahn, *Return of the Jedi*, 155.

<sup>24</sup> Kahn, *Return of the Jedi*, 69.

<sup>25</sup> Kahn, *Return of the Jedi*, 175.



Even though these references also contain elements that would later be retconned, they position the novel within a larger mythology, and again include early hints of where the story would ultimately lead (back to). On the other hand, the novelization functions as a corrective text that tries to counter what Kahn perceived to be the film's flaws. In this way, the text can be read as an attempt to respond to every fan's impossible wish regarding every Star Wars film after the irreproachable *The Empire Strikes Back*, namely to redo the Star Wars sequel in question as it should have been done.

### The Prequel Trilogy

By the time of *The Phantom Menace*'s novelization (1999), Lucasfilm's policy regarding adaptation had changed. At the end of the 1980s, when there were virtually no new Star Wars-related media on the market, Bantam proposed starting a series of Star Wars novels, commissioning Timothy Zahn to write a sequel trilogy. While they began to churn out a deluge of franchise novels of varying quality very quickly, the original idea was, in fact, to produce one well-written hardback a year that would be marketed as a movie-like event.<sup>26</sup> The success of these franchise novels made Lucasfilm pay more attention to Star Wars literature: they started to exert more control with an eye to Star Wars canon (even though the rule was that anything could be contradicted by film or television work authorized by Lucas), but Bantam's success with Star Wars franchise novels did influence their approach to the novelizations of the prequel trilogy.

While *The Phantom Menace* has all the hallmarks of commercial fiction—the novel was a predestined bestseller and was released with four different covers the fans could collect<sup>27</sup>—it also attempts to increase its literary prestige: the novelization was longer than the typical screenplay transcription, it was “the first *Star Wars* movie novelization to add newly created scenes unique to the book,”<sup>28</sup> and it was written by Terry Brooks, a bestselling author of fantasy novels. Like Star Wars novelizers before him, Brooks received direct input from George Lucas, but the additional material is more substantive than in previous novelizations: going further than

26 Taylor, *How Star Wars Conquered the Universe*, 288.

27 For an analysis of the novelization as a bestseller, see <http://bestsellers.lib.virginia.edu/submissions/344>.

28 Hidalgo, *Star Wars: The Essential Reader's Companion*, 50.

Kahn's *Return of the Jedi*, it provides many explanations and motivations, and plentiful characterization. The novel features more background on the Jedi Order and the Sith (all of which has since been expanded in franchise novels, comics, and video games) and even includes a new beginning and a new sequence involving Anakin Skywalker, who consequently becomes more central to the story.

*The Phantom Menace's* novelization was clearly used as a template for the next novelizations in scale, ambition, and approach. Continuing the established tradition, these novelizations were written by different authors. Science-fiction and fantasy author R.A. Salvatore's novelization of *Attack of the Clones* (2002) again contains exclusive sequences: the first three chapters, for instance, mainly deal with the abduction of Anakin's mother, Shmi Skywalker. The novel also features plenty of direct references to the other films, such as a mid-novel, one-page recapitulation: "that reminded Obi-Wan of the difficult circumstances under which Anakin had entered the Order."<sup>29</sup> In the description of Obi-Wan Kenobi—"Obi-Wan's wheat-colored hair was longer now, hanging loosely about his shoulders"<sup>30</sup>—the word "now" is deictic and explicitly appeals to the reader's familiarity with *The Phantom Menace*. At one instance, Salvatore even refers to a sequence from the previous novelization (in which Anakin saves the life of a Tusken Raider) that is not present in the corresponding film:

He'd had some experience with Tusken Raiders, but on a very limited basis. Once he had tended the wound of one gravely injured Raider, and when the Tusken's friends showed up, they had let him go—something unheard of among the more civilized species of Tatooine.<sup>31</sup>

This exceptional reference to another novelization (rather than to the films) is all the more striking because it seems to serve no practical purpose here. The context even seems opposite to the recapitulated situation, but it does help to flesh out Anakin's biography.

Taking the usual nods to the Star Wars mega-text one step further, Matthew Stover's *Revenge of the Sith* novelization (2005) continually refers to the previous and next episodes, and even includes many instances of more obscure references to other texts in the transmedia universe to the extent that the novel can only be fully understood by the knowledgeable Star

29 R. A. Salvatore, *Star Wars: Episode II—Attack of the Clones* (London: Century, 2002), 105.

30 Salvatore, *Star Wars: Episode II*, 40.

31 Salvatore, *Star Wars: Episode II*, 232.

Wars fan: “Flying, he could forget about his slavery, about his mother, about Geonosis and Jabiim, Aargonar and Muunilinst and all the catastrophes of this brutal war.”<sup>32</sup> Stover’s fan service has paid off, as the novel is allegedly “a minor classic, much beloved by fans,” not in the least because it elucidates Anakin’s turn to the dark side.<sup>33</sup> Like Kahn’s *Return of the Jedi*, it tries to correct perceived flaws in the film. According to Hidalgo, “its greatest additions to the screenplay are extensive internal viewpoints exploring the psychological underpinnings to character actions.”<sup>34</sup> In effect, the novel seems to be the culmination of the strategies in the previously discussed novelizations: there is extensive additional material and characterization, and every action is motivated.<sup>35</sup>

With the story of *Revenge of the Sith* revealed, the present catches up with the past for Star Wars fans. In a way, this is mirrored in the novel, which, as Hidalgo also notes, “often switches tenses and time frames to present the story as both an event of the past, and one ‘currently’ unfolding.”<sup>36</sup> This is already apparent on the opening page:

*This story happened a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away. It is already over. Nothing can be done to change it. [...] It is the story of the end of an age. A strange thing about stories—Though this all happened so long ago and so far away that words cannot describe the time or the distance, it is also happening right now. Right here. It is happening as you read these words. This is how twenty-five millennia come to a close. [...] The end starts now.*<sup>37</sup>

On the one hand, Stover builds upon, or even adapts, Lucas’s mythologization of Star Wars as a story of the “used” past (rather than one set in the future). On the other hand, he draws attention to the novel’s own status as a narrative: as a prequel, it is a story that was over before it even began, and there is nothing that the narrator can do to change its outcome. Moreover, although the novel is mostly written in the traditional past tense, these first lines shift the narrative to the present. Indeed, in several sequences, the reader is even put into the place of the characters:

32 Matthew Stover, *Star Wars: Episode III—Revenge of the Sith* (London: Century, 2005), 21.

33 Taylor, *How Star Wars Conquered the Universe*, 368.

34 Hidalgo, *Star Wars: The Essential Reader’s Companion*, 126.

35 For instance, the lightsaber fight between Obi-Wan Kenobi, Anakin Skywalker, and Count Dooku—explained in terms of Star Wars lightsaber combat forms—is quite short in the film but lasts fifteen pages in the novel.

36 Hidalgo, *Star Wars: The Essential Reader’s Companion*, 126–127.

37 Stover, *Star Wars: Episode III*, xi.

This is how it feels to be Anakin Skywalker, right now: You don't remember putting away your lightsaber. You don't remember moving from Palpatine's private office to his larger public one; [...] You remember only that the last man in the galaxy you still thought you could trust has been lying to you since the day you met. [...] Inside your head, there is only fire. Around your heart, the dragon whispers that all things die. This is how it feels to be Anakin Skywalker, right now.<sup>38</sup>

From this passage, which occurs right after the Emperor has revealed himself to Anakin, the viewer also cannot "remember" the actions, thoughts, and dialogue, as it does not occur in the final film. In this novelization, it is not important anymore to reproduce the film precisely; instead, it is meant to be a separate, enhanced experience. The shift to the present tense and second-person point of view also makes the novel reminiscent of a Choose Your Own Adventure book. Although the reader remains passive here, the novel offers an alternate version of the story. In this way, the novelization becomes part of the heavily intertextual and interactive Star Wars narrative, in which the franchise's readers/viewers/gamers pick and choose their own experiences amongst a plethora of heavily referential media tie-ins, and in which novelizations are only one of the myriad possibilities for storyworld engagement.

### *The Force Awakens*

As *The Force Awakens* pays homage to and even recapitulates major narrative moments of *A New Hope*, it is fitting that the novelization of *The Force Awakens* also returns to the template of the first film's novelization and to its author, Alan Dean Foster. Besides the occasional addition, such as an introductory three pages, which retell the opening crawl, characteristic plot correction, and (pseudo-)scientific explanation—e.g., "the resulting graviton flux released enough heat to ignite the core [...] Turning the planet into what astrophysicists called a pocket nova"<sup>39</sup>—the novelization sticks closely to the screenplay and film. While Foster's style and approach have remained the same, the constraints and control have been tightened: for *The Force Awakens* novelization, the "Lucasfilm Story Group vetted everything

38 Stover, *Star Wars: Episode III*, 290-293.

39 Alan Dean Foster, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (London: Century, 2016), 175.

and while some of Foster's creations stayed in the book, others he was asked to take out."<sup>40</sup>

This can be connected to the changed production circumstances. When the franchise changed owners to Disney, the EU was reformulated as Star Wars Legends, but, even officially, the novelizations are a special case. As Del Rey tweeted, "movie novelizations are canon where they align with what is seen on screen in the 6 films and the Clone Wars animated movie."<sup>41</sup> The lingering perceived irrelevance of novelizations (why read the book when you can see the film?) is mirrored here in the confusion about their canonicity. According to the new Lucasfilm Story Group's continuity standards, the novelizations do not seem to matter. Hidalgo, a member of the Story Group, for example, tweeted, "remember these novels have Luke as Blue Five, a blue-skinned Yoda, and Owen as Ben's brother."<sup>42</sup> Yet despite these continuity errors, the novelization cannot be retired as easily as the EU novels because of their strong association with the films. The novelizations still remain in print—bundled into two trilogy omnibuses—as historical documents or nostalgic "time capsules"<sup>43</sup> from another galaxy, another time.

More significantly, the novelizations have been a testament to the changing attitude towards the storyworld and transmedia franchising strategies utilized throughout Star Wars history—an attitude that has strongly influenced the approach and constraints of each novel. The first novelization was written on the occasion of a one-off film event, with even its direct sequel (Foster's *Splinter of the Mind's Eye*) lacking input for a larger framework. The other two novelizations of the original trilogy had to deal with the secrecy surrounding those films' productions and just as the films had different directors, the novels were written by different authors. The expansion of the Star Wars storyworld through print fiction, as a way to maintain interest in the franchise, had become increasingly important by the time of the prequel trilogy. The prequels' novelizations thus have strong ties to other transmedia Star Wars texts and provide additional, then canonical, background. It is no surprise, then, that as Disney has reined in

40 Lisa Granshaw, "Star Wars: The Force Awakens Novelization: An Interview with Alan Dean Foster," *Syfy Wire*, January 22, 2016, accessed February 20, 2017, <http://www.blastr.com/2016-1-22/star-wars-force-awakens-novelization-interview-alan-dean-foster>.

41 Star Wars Books (@DelReyStarWars), Twitter post, April 30, 2014, 11:54a.m., <https://twitter.com/delreystarwars/status/461579307341840384>.

42 Inside Sources (@pablohidalgo), Twitter post, December 24, 2015, 5:46p.m., <https://twitter.com/pablohidalgo/status/680202967106994176>.

43 Inside Sources (@pablohidalgo), Twitter post, December 24, 2015, 6:08p.m., <https://twitter.com/pablohidalgo/status/680208376156913664>.

and reset the storyworld, they have also returned to the original strategy so as not to spoil future ideas. In other words, the greater the potential, the greater the control over the transmedia content. As the cycle begins anew, it remains to be seen whether future novelizations will again be allowed to contribute value to the storyworld for readers and fans.



## 5. Franchising Empire

Parker Brothers, Atari, and the Rise of LucasArts

*Stefan Hall*

Video games are everywhere. In watches, cell phones, handheld units, on a variety of home consoles and computer operating systems, and within arcades, played by solitary gamers as much as by groups of friends and strangers, in private and in public, across computer networks and even at professional video-game competitions. While video games have been the subject of, or have played a significant role in, films or have been adapted into films, the examination of films turned into gaming properties is a rich topic because of the ways that films and video games converge and diverge. When the topic of film and video games is mentioned, people tend to think about the adaptation *from* video games *to* film, yet considering films that have been the source for video game adaptation yields a particularly interesting category for video games. Films continue to prompt the development of many games; the influence here is as much visual as it is conceptual (in terms of characters and narrative) and economic.

With the introduction of the second generation of home consoles (1976-1983), companies inside and outside of the video game industry sought to harness improved technology to create properties based on adapted media. From arcade ports to comic-book and film adaptations, the video-game industry sought connections with media sources that inspired transmedia design in the past and also sought to make these more formal as a burgeoning business sector through contracted commercial ventures. Given the necessarily visual nature of video games, an apparent source of rich material for adaptation existed in film. As both the video-game industry and film industry sought to find ways to license existing media properties, fantastic genres readily emerged as a rich source to be tapped, and *Star Wars* proved to be a particularly lucrative property for adaptation by game designers.

Parker Brothers, a toy and game manufacturer known for publishing major hits such as *Sorry!* (1934) and *Monopoly* (1935), entered the home console video game market in 1982. The company had found success in 1978 with the electronic handheld game *Merlin*, selling the entire production run of 700,000 units before Christmas and reaching \$100 million in sales the



following year.<sup>1</sup> But this success was short-lived, as the handheld game market quickly became oversaturated and sales began to fall. Early in 1981, the head of Atari's home computer division approached the senior vice president of research and development at Parker Brothers to ask if Atari could license some Parker Brothers board games for home cartridge versions. Having flirted with success in electronic handheld games, Parker Brothers decided Atari's interest was evidence enough that they should develop their own games. What made the entry of Parker Brothers different from that of other third-party software producers was the fact that they were an established gaming company with a significant research and development division to help ease the transition from physical to digital games.

At a cost of \$50,000, Parker Brothers reverse-engineered Atari's hardware, enabling them to move into cartridge production independently.<sup>2</sup> While game development was being pursued at Parker Brothers, parent company General Mills investigated two other possible scenarios for entry into the video-game market. The marketing and design office advocated a new video-game system to compete with Atari, which would require a tremendous commitment of resources. Kenner proposed licensing properties such as Star Wars action figures and Strawberry Shortcake to Atari in order to minimize risk of developing a rival game system, but Parker Brothers presented a compromise to program their own cartridges internally, first for the Atari console, then for the Intellivision, and finally for home computers.<sup>3</sup> Since General Mills owned both Kenner and Parker Brothers, it was relatively easy for Parker Brothers to obtain the game development rights and essentially outmaneuver Twentieth Century Fox on their own film property.<sup>4</sup> The excitement at the debut of *Frogger* and the film-to-game adaptation *Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* (SW:ESB) at the 1982 Toy Fair prompted Parker Brothers to revise its initial profit forecast of \$15 million several times over and to create at least four other titles for release that year.

1 Philip Orbanes, *The Game Makers: The Story of Parker Brothers from Tiddledy Winks to Trivial Pursuit*, (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 2003), 174-75.

2 Sydney Ladensohn Stern and Ted Schoenhaus, *Toyland: The High-Stakes Game of the Toy Industry* (Chicago: Contemporary Books, 1990), 259.

3 Orbanes, *The Game Makers*, 181.

4 Twentieth Century Fox became the first film studio to specifically create a video game development studio when it established Fox Video Games as a subsidiary, first by licensing games from Sirius Software and then using titles in their distribution catalog as the basis for video games, including *MegaForce* (1982), *Fantastic Voyage* (1982), and *Spacemaster X-7* (1983).

From June through December 1982, cartridge sales ultimately generated \$74 million in revenue for Parker Brothers.<sup>5</sup>

Given the technological limitations of the time, *SW:ESB* did not attempt to replicate the entire film's narrative, as later film-to-game adaptations did, but took a particular moment and developed a game around it. In this case, the Empire's memorable assault on the Rebels' stronghold on Hoth was especially useful. Parker Brothers marketing manager Bill Bracy recalled the process of choosing the topic of the adaptation as coming from a small group "including traditional game designers, video game players, and a couple of us in marketing brainstorm[ing] on the various scenes from *The Empire Strikes Back*" and "developing storyboards and experimenting with game techniques."<sup>6</sup>

By limiting themselves to the Hoth battle, the development team at Parker Brothers created a side-scrolling shooter that fit nicely into a familiar genre. In dealing with the memory restrictions of home consoles, the most detail is devoted to the vehicles, which—though blocky—are still easily recognizable. Scale is also important, with the player's snowspeeder dwarfed by the size of the AT-ATs, providing an effect not typically seen in games at the time, as the player and the opponents were often equal in size. The use of parallax scrolling between the mountain range in the background and the surface ice in the foreground creates a distinctive depth of field. Finally, the iconic theme from the John Williams score, synthesized through the platform's audio hardware, is played when the game is first started and again every two minutes for as long as the player survives the attack. Surviving then prompts a 20-second audio clip of the main title theme that functions as a power-up, imbuing the player with the Force and becoming invulnerable to enemy attack. But as viewers of the film surely know, the Rebels are still defeated in the end.<sup>7</sup> Any sort of success in the game therefore comes not from changing the narrative established by the film, but in delaying its outcome as long as possible.

5 Orbanes, *The Game Makers*, 186.

6 Nick Montfort and Ian Bogost, *Racing the Beam: The Atari Video Computer System* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2009), 128.

7 Noted author Harlan Ellison wrote an infamous review of the *SW:ESB* game in 1982 for the September issue *Video Review* magazine in which he likened the repetitive gameplay to the myth of Sisyphus, describing the "inspired exploitation of the *Star Wars* totem in videogame form [...] as the most virulent electronic botulism," and generally decrying the game because it did not allow for the possibility of winning (since the player will either run out of ships or the power generator will be destroyed). Harlan Ellison, "Rolling Dat Ole Debbil Electronic Stone," *Sleepless Nights in the Procrustean Bed* (San Bernardino: Borgo Press, 1984), 70.

While gamers had already become used to losing all of their lives in a game and, indeed, many games of this time have no ultimate, resolvable goal of victory, the ludic pleasure of gameplay clearly trumps the usual sense of (narratological) victory.

*SW:ESB* is a key text in Star Wars's transmedia history and indeed in the history of video games because it is considered the first official licensing of a film-to-game property for home consoles.<sup>8</sup> Produced for both the Atari Video Computer System (VCS) and the Mattel Intellivision, the game also functioned as a cross-platform title. This business model differed from the exclusivity that Atari later promoted with its film-to-game properties; the decision to promote a title as exclusive to a particular console or to diversify across several different hardware platforms is central to the contemporary video game industry, particularly as significant and potentially lucrative endorsement deals are imbricated in these decisions. For a company entering the video game market for the first time, the decision for Parker Brothers to provide cross-platform support gave them an advantage over Atari and Mattel, who only produced games for their own systems, while demonstrating that Parker Brothers was making a serious commitment to video games.<sup>9</sup> Although the game adaptation post-dated *The Empire Strikes Back* by two years, the popularity and success of *SW:ESB* also set the precedent for video-game developers to license games based on films that had been released years (or even decades) earlier.

Two subsequent titles—*Star Wars: The Arcade Game* and *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi: Death Star Battle*—were produced by Parker Brothers for the Atari 2600, with cross-platform versions for the Atari 5200. An additional 2600 title, *Star Wars: Jedi Arena*, based tangentially on *A New Hope*'s lightsaber training droid sequence, was released by Parker Brothers, with another *Return of the Jedi* title (*Ewok Adventure*) developed but never released. The release of *SW:ESB* “shows how a compelling cinematic situation can be translated effectively into a videogame challenge.”<sup>10</sup> It also initiated the most prolific franchise in video-game history, in addition to being the most licensed film property, with over 120 unique titles appearing

8 The first game to be made and released in conjunction with a theatrical film was *TRON*, released in 1982 several months before *SW:ESB*. *TRON* was an arcade game before being ported to a series of titles for the Atari and Intellivision consoles.

9 At the time that support for both systems was announced, Parker Brothers had only possessed the capability to program for the Atari. The engineers quickly employed their reverse-engineering tricks with the Intellivision and would later go on to do the same with the Colecovision platform and several home computer systems.

10 Montfort and Bogost, *Racing the Beam*, 16.

in the 35 years following the release of *SW:ESB* across all available platforms and ranging across a wide variety of genres.

Having observed the success of *SW:ESB*, other companies quickly began to produce games based on film properties, including Atari. It scored two of the biggest film licenses in those years when Atari acquired the home game rights to the Steven Spielberg blockbusters *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1981) and *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982) for a combined \$20 million.<sup>11</sup> Atari also sought out other agreements in 1982, gaining the rights to arcade games based on the Star Wars license, as the Parker Brothers contracts had only covered home console cartridges. While Parker Brothers had outmaneuvered Atari on the console front, Atari had something Parker Brothers did not: an established coin-op division, which was the foundation of Atari as a company.<sup>12</sup>

*Star Wars: The Arcade Game* (*SW:TAG*) was a first-person flight simulator released two months after *Return of the Jedi* hit theaters, despite being a loose adaptation of a scenario from *A New Hope*.<sup>13</sup> *SW:TAG* featured digitized audio effects lifted from the film, including voice samples of Luke Skywalker, Darth Vader, Han Solo, and Obi-Wan Kenobi, in addition to the main title theme. It had originally been developed as a game called *Warp Speed*, designed by Ed Rotberg. When Rotberg left Atari, his game was overhauled to produce *SW:TAG*, and most of the original game elements were changed.<sup>14</sup> The player dogfights with TIE fighters en route to the Death Star, using a yoke controller scheme instead of the typical joystick, and then flies the trench run from the film (see Drew Morton's chapter in this volume). The trench was somewhat different from that of the film and, as the game became more difficult during play, an intermediate level was introduced for the player to fly through involving a run across the surface of the Death Star to reach the trench. High-scoring players were awarded by induction into Princess Leia's Rebel Guard. To further highlight the connection between the game and film, Atari produced a promotional poster for the game in the style of the theatrical one-sheet.

Lucasfilm responded to Atari's initial proposal for the game in an internal memo dated December 15, 1982 by providing a list of seven points to eliminate inconsistencies between the game and the Star Wars storyworld. This

11 Rusel DeMaria and Johnny Wilson, *High Score! The Illustrated History of Electronic Games* (New York: McGraw-Hill/Osborne, 2004), 99.

12 Additionally, when Parker Brothers ported *SW:TAG* to home consoles, Atari was able to get a piece of the revenue.

13 John Sellers, *Arcade Fever: The Fan's Guide to the Golden Age of Video Games* (Philadelphia, PA: Running Press, 2001), 132.

14 DeMaria and Wilson, *High Score!*, 90.

includes an explanation of how X-Wings are piloted, celestial mechanics, an in-game rationalization for how deflector shields are charged, and clarification of terms such as “parsecs” and “warp drive” (which is, as the memo points out, a term from *Star Trek*). In the prototype phase, Atari conducted focus group testing on January 24, 1983: three groups of players—15-19 year-old men, 20-35 year-old men, and 17-30 year-old women—provided interesting feedback about the game. Although its reception was generally positive, the playtesters did raise the question as to why the game was being designed so long after the movie’s release date. All groups saw the game as appealing most strongly to male gamers. Another request was for the addition of a sit-down cabinet for added realism and the game was therefore released in both upright cabinet and cockpit (with stereo surround sound) versions.<sup>15</sup>

Lucasfilm was perhaps the most notable movie studio joining the ranks of companies looking to expand their properties through video games in the 1980s. With the financial success of *Star Wars*, fueled by the sale of licensed merchandise, Lucasfilm had the financial power to diversify across other media and so made its first steps into the video-game industry. Its Games Group was founded in May 1982 within Lucasfilm’s Computer Division. By cushioning the Games Group within several levels of its corporate structure, Lucasfilm created a sort of contained design environment in what is now commonly referred to as a “game incubator.” To further strengthen the Games Group, Lucas signed a joint cooperative agreement with Atari,<sup>16</sup> after which Atari invested \$1 million into the Games Group.<sup>17</sup> According to Robert Doris, Vice President of Lucasfilm and general manager of the Computer Division, the company’s movement into the video-game business was a calculated result of the perception that video games were becoming increasingly cinematic. While this was an advantageous deal for both parties, Lucasfilm used Atari as a testing bed for video-game development, taking several years to release the first two games—*Rescue on Fractalus!* and *Ballblazer* for the 5200 and the 7800 game systems—because “[a]mid this convergence of technology and entertainment, it was apparent that the core target audiences of special-effects movies and the Atari game

15 Interestingly, according to an inter-office memo dated August 2, 1983, Atari may have considered a *Star Wars II* game that would essentially have linked games, in a sort of primitive multiplayer system, to give players a squadron attack experience.

16 Michael Ciraolo, “Lucasfilm & Atari: Creative Partners,” *Antic* 3, no. 4 (1984): 40.

17 DeMaria and Wilson, *High Score!*, 198.

platform had significant similarities.”<sup>18</sup> The Games Group began by creating basic 3D point-of-view (POV) routines as an experiment, and then turned to studying the dedicated chips and microprocessor of Atari’s computer.<sup>19</sup> Since 3D computer modeling was barely in its infancy, the Games Group had Industrial Light & Magic create scale models of the ships in *Ballblazer* and *Rescue on Fractalus!* using the same process as the Star Wars films. This gave the group a thorough understanding not only of the basic game architecture, but also of where the technology could be pushed or “how the form might evolve—ultimately, maybe, to meld with movies themselves.”<sup>20</sup>

In 1983, two early versions of the first games—known at that point as *BallBlaster* and *Rebel Rescue*—were shown to Atari.<sup>21</sup> Final versions of the games were delivered in May 1984 and announced at a press conference that began with the opening sequence from *A New Hope*.<sup>22</sup> This long period of development enabled Lucasfilm to experience video-game industry operations while only committing a small amount of resources (the Games Group initially only counted six men). The Games Group borrowed heavily from development procedures in the film-production division, including drawing models, making costumes, and writing extensive storylines to develop a narrative underpinning for the games more fully. As Langston explained, “My charter was to figure out where in the entertainment industry to apply the kind of high-tech approaches that were proving so revolutionary in graphics, sound, and editing for movies [...] It took very little time to settle on pursuing games.”<sup>23</sup> An internal memo written by game designer David Fox in 1982 listed some thoughts on game development, in particular what films do well—such as special effects modeling new realities and creating narrative engagement—and where video games lag behind, noting that

18 Rob Smith, *Rogue Leaders: The Story of LucasArts* (San Francisco, CA: Chronicle Books, 2008), 11.

19 Peter Langston, “Ten Tips from the Programming Pros: Secrets from Lucasfilm’s Game Group,” *Atari Connection* (Spring 1984): 34.

20 Associated Press, “Lucas Looks beyond Film—Will Interactive Movies Try to Eat Your Popcorn?” *Access* (Fall 1984), 12.

21 During testing of *Rebel Rescue*, Lucas looked for a fire button on the controls. In the game’s fiction, it was explained that the weapons had been removed to make more room for the marooned pilots to be rescued. Lucas asked Fox if that was a part of the game design or a moral choice. This is an important question to raise, and the introduction of moral choices as part of the play mechanics usually took the form of alternate endings based on what actions the player had or had not done. Offering different narrative outcomes was initially far easier to do on computers and helped to distinguish them from other gaming platforms.

22 Jonathan Greer, “Star Wars’ Creator Teams Up with Atari,” *San Jose Mercury News*, May 8 1984, G1.

23 Smith, *Rogue Leaders*, 12–13.

they were not taking full advantage of the hardware, including video and audio); that they sometimes seemed constrained in game mechanics due to genre; and that they did not offer a high level of escapism.<sup>24</sup>

For many years, Lucasfilm Games would eschew developing its own Star Wars games, preferring to license out the franchise instead. By Lucas's own admission, "I wanted to have a really creative, independent shop. It's not a coincidence that our early video games were *not* based on the *Star Wars* or *Indiana Jones* films."<sup>25</sup> In 1990, a reorganization of the Lucas companies made Lucasfilm's Games Group a part of the newly created LucasArts Entertainment Company, which included Industrial Light & Magic and Skywalker Sound. After achieving a level of success with *Indiana Jones* games, Lucasfilm Games finally moved on to creating its own Star Wars game after licensing the property to other developers for several years. Because the publishing rights were still owned by JVC, the first Lucas-originated Star Wars games had some insulation against risk should something go awry. To add extra insurance, Lucasfilm Games handled design and production, while subcontracting the actual programming to Beam Software, an outside studio based in Australia.<sup>26</sup> The deal with JVC included six games to be developed for the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES), with JVC advancing \$1 million and each game budgeted at \$80,000-\$100,000 for development, leaving a financial cushion to handle any development issues. As production on *Star Wars* (the game named simply after the first film's original title) commenced with an eye on a September 1990 release date, an issue with the limited memory capacity of the NES arose. Therefore, the drive "to re-create every significant *Star Wars*-movie action scene was abandoned in favor of fitting key gameplay scenes into the 128K available on the NES."<sup>27</sup> Like the Parker Brothers version of *SW:ESB*, the game designers had to decide what constituted an essential experience of the film and put that into some sort of playable system.

Side-scrolling platformers were popular at the time, so the game was designed for the player to primarily control Luke Skywalker—with Princess Leia and Han Solo used for certain missions—and concentrated on distinct locales such as Tatooine and the Death Star. To diversify the play experience

24 Fox also raised a question regarding the licensing agreement of Star Wars, as the title of *Rebel Rescue* had to be changed because of its loose connection to the Star Wars universe, wondering if games might be set in the world of the films that reference places, vehicles, and weapons, but provide new characters and stories.

25 Smith, *Rogue Leaders*, 7.

26 Smith, *Rogue Leaders*, 72.

27 Smith, *Rogue Leaders*, 73.



further, a first-person asteroid belt mission and a top-down Death Star trench run sequence were added. Between the popularity of the NES and the recognizability of the Star Wars brand, the game sold well and production on *The Empire Strikes Back* began soon thereafter in collaboration with Utah-based Sculptured Software as subcontracted developer. This game essentially followed the same formula as its predecessor and attempted to identify core cinematic referents (locations like Hoth, Dagobah, and Bespin, and characters like Darth Vader, Boba Fett, and Yoda) while introducing some gameplay not seen in the film, such as fighting the cloud cars of Cloud City and racing against Boba Fett's *Slave I*.

The decision to include these extra-cinematic play elements opened the door to questions of authenticity and canon for this incarnation of the franchise. This is an especially notable issue for Star Wars in that the films are often seen as the source from which all other stories derive.<sup>28</sup> While Lucas had final say over all Star Wars products, and the EU tried to stay consistent at the time with the elements of the films, licensed media properties generally had to remain aligned with the overall canon while also offering experiences to their audiences that utilized the best aspects of each medium. Predominantly for video games, this meant striking a balance between the narrative, the look of the game, and available gameplay options.<sup>29</sup> This issue becomes especially important for film-to-game adaptations that attempt to enlarge the world presented within the film.

While *TESB* was in development in 1991, Nintendo released the Super NES (SNES), whose increased hardware potential piqued the attention of Lucasfilm Games. A decision was therefore made to develop most of the game in-house, with Sculptured Software providing technical implementation. Both *Super Star Wars* (1992) and *Super Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back* (*SSW:ESB*, 1993) were praised for taking advantage of the graphics capability at the time, as well as being fun to play.<sup>30</sup> Like *The Empire Strikes Back* on the NES, *SSW:ESB* also veered away from what was canonical as far as the film showed, with part of the rationale being that the game's

28 The EU was especially important in the 1990s. In particular, Timothy Zahn's Thrawn Trilogy novels (1991-1993) renewed interest in the Star Wars brand, further enabling the video games to capitalize on the franchise's cultural appeal in the absence of any theatrical films.

29 For example, the fighting game *Masters of Teräs Käsi* (1997) goes to great narrative lengths to explain why Star Wars characters are pitted in arena-style combat and, for this reason (as well as bad game controls), it was widely regarded as a flop.

30 One of the advantages of the SNES was Mode 7, a texture-mapping technique to change rotation and scale and thus provide a sense of 3D perspective, which allowed game designers to more closely emulate the look of a movie world.



“visual effects created a clear separation in the audience’s mind between a small-screen interactive game and a big-screen blockbuster.”<sup>31</sup> While this sounds somewhat plausible given the severe technological limitations in terms of video games’ degree of cinematic realism in the early 1990s, this particular distinction between a game and a film has since been disrupted with the most current capabilities of gaming technology.

The success of the NES and SNES Star Wars titles gave Lucasfilm Games the clout to restructure its distribution deals and eliminate the need for external publishers. For the newly rebranded LucasArts, technological issues again pushed game design, specifically in CD-ROMs. While the standards for using compact discs as a computer storage medium had been established by Sony and Philips in 1985, practical and affordable distribution to the home user took several more years. *Rebel Assault*’s release in 1993 was a primary reason why many home computer users decided to upgrade to computers equipped with a CD-ROM drive.<sup>32</sup> The CD-ROM’s storage potential not only meant that game developers could create more sophisticated programs that would offer improved graphics and longer play experiences, but they could also incorporate live-action footage seen in full-motion video (FMV) games such as *The 7th Guest* (1992) and *Voyeur* (1993). The designers of *Rebel Assault* decided to film new live-action footage set in the Star Wars universe and this development caught Lucas’s attention:

If video was suddenly the primary visual production method, the games would start to encroach on the movie space. According to producer Hal Barwood, Lucas was concerned that if movie-like footage was shot, it could cause confusion with the film canon, and players would assume Lucas was somehow at the helm.<sup>33</sup>

The live-action footage was instead combined with overlaid sprites that created sophisticated visuals that still remained distinct from cinematic photorealism.<sup>34</sup> Memory constraints and processing power also restricted the free movement and sense of exploration that players experienced in other games by necessitating that the action largely remain confined to a

31 Smith, *Rogue Leaders*, 74.

32 Mark Langshaw, “Star Wars: Rebel Assault’ Retrospective: A Force to Be Reckoned With,” *Digital Spy*, April 6, 2013, accessed May 15, 2017, <http://www.digitalspy.com/gaming/retro-gaming/news/a470859/star-wars-rebel-assault-retrospective-a-force-to-be-reckoned-with/>.

33 Smith, *Rogue Leaders*, 78.

34 Live-action scenes would be used again in *Rebel Assault II* (1995) and even more so—an entire hour’s worth—in *Jedi Knight: Dark Forces II* (1997).

limited combination of interactions, making the game function like a rail shooter. Finally, the game design provided a play experience that lasted only a few hours, roughly equivalent to a Star Wars movie, thus also keeping development costs more manageable.

Despite these limitations, *Rebel Assault*'s look and style helped make the game a major success. Before its release, CD-ROM games sold an average of 10,000 copies, but the first-day shipment of *Rebel Assault* moved 110,000 units; the game ultimately reached sales of over a million copies.<sup>35</sup> While its popularity certainly could be attributed partly to the Star Wars brand itself, the gameplay also suggested a more cinematic experience and indicated another direction for game design as the hardware advanced. As Lucas noted in a March 3, 1994 memo to *Rebel Assault*'s development staff:

By taking "Star Wars" into the CD-ROM platform you've extended my original story ideas into a new and different form of entertainment. You seem to have set the standard for what this new medium can accomplish for interactive entertainment. It's great that we can also set the standard for what sales can be as well.<sup>36</sup>

The game's influence, particularly in its use of CD-ROM technology, helped the LucasArts developers free themselves from the memory restrictions of computer-system storage at the time and gave them new ideas for game development.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Lucasfilm Games developed a series of military simulation games, beginning with *Battlehawks 1942* (1988), a WWII trilogy created by a team led by Lawrence Holland. Holland drew upon this experience for his next LucasArts project, the *X-Wing* series (1993-1999).<sup>37</sup> This EU series attempted to simulate the film experience of starfighter combat faithfully, which itself was based on gun-camera dogfight footage Lucas had studied while making *A New Hope*.

In the early titles—*X-Wing*, released in 1993, with the expansions *Imperial Pursuit* and *B-Wing* following the same year—the player worked for the Rebel Alliance. These games begin before the events in *A New Hope* and involve missions in which allies must be located and the Death Star plans

35 Smith, *Rogue Leaders*, 78.

36 Smith, *Rogue Leaders*, 80.

37 Beginning in 1995, Michael Stackpole, collaborating with Mike Baron, produced a popular *X-Wing: Rogue Squadron* comic book for Dark Horse. A year later, Stackpole, along with Aaron Allston, also produced the popular *X-Wing* novel series for Bantam Spectra.

must be delivered to Princess Leia. The action then moves to intersect with the film and the attack on the Death Star. Players then deal with the evacuation of Yavin IV, eventually arriving on Hoth shortly before the events in *The Empire Strikes Back*. The game was another commercial success that gave players a new opportunity to fly spaceships within the Star Wars universe.

Additional Star Wars games opened up the possibilities for fan-player engagement with the storyworld by allowing players to fly for the Galactic Empire in *TIE Fighter*, a move that highlighted the conception of morality in the Star Wars universe, which began as something fairly nuanced before becoming more dogmatic in later Star Wars titles.<sup>38</sup> According to Holland, “In most great works, the villain or evil side has a lot of intrigue, and we wanted to design with that in mind. We gave the Empire shades of gray, and gave the player a chance to achieve some nobility.”<sup>39</sup> The game’s narrative begins after the Rebels’ routing on Hoth, continuing through a series of missions in which the player must not only fight the Rebels but help to quell civil wars, dispatch pirates and traitorous Imperials, complete secret objectives for the Emperor, and generally try to keep the peace, albeit through heavily militaristic means.

The first and last games in the series—*X-Wing* (1993) and *X-Wing Alliance* (1999)—paralleled events in the original Star Wars trilogy, including end-game missions that recreate the attacks on the first and second Death Stars, despite the fact that Holland, with *X-Wing*, “didn’t want to do the movie over again, though, but put in the familiar elements in a similar story.”<sup>40</sup> Most of the games feature voice acting, which was somewhat unusual for the time, and animated cut scenes (supplemented with occasional computer rendering) that advance the storyline, as well as feature music from the original trilogy. Like *X-Wing* before it, *TIE Fighter* was a major commercial success, eventually outselling *X-Wing*, and benefiting from improvements in the game’s programming.<sup>41</sup> These critically and financially successful games released by Lucasfilm Games/LucasArts demonstrated that it was possible for a production company to flourish in the video-game industry, draw upon and repurpose their own internal assets, and adapt films to

38 The ability to fly for either the Rebel Alliance or the Galactic Empire was proposed for *X-Wing* but dropped due to programming and time constraints.

39 DeMaria and Wilson, *High Score!*, 203.

40 DeMaria and Wilson, *High Score!*, 203.

41 Anticipation for the game was so high that Dodge used it as part of their promotional campaign for the Neon. People who test-drove the car received a demo of the game consisting of one playable level in an unfinished build and an advertisement for the Neon.

games as appropriate to the medium, often while pushing the boundaries of existing gaming technology.

Even as LucasArts continued to develop new film-to-game Star Wars titles, the older titles in its catalog continued to be profitable. In this regard, despite some occasional technical upgrades, the gameplay remained engaging even if the graphics had grown dated by contemporary standards. Although its film-to-game properties were confined almost exclusively to Star Wars, LucasArts was a useful model for other film studios to consider ways to successfully manage franchise development in video games, not only for adaptations but also for acclaimed original works such as *The Secret of Monkey Island* (1990) and *Grim Fandango* (1998). With the 2012 acquisition by Disney and the subsequent dissolution of almost all of the LucasArts staff, the company now exists solely as a licensor of branded IP. It is important, however, to remember the technological and industrial innovations that made LucasArts such a successful and influential company. Considering how quickly change transpires in the video-game industry, it is useful to reflect on this nascent part of its history and consider how earlier developers like Parker Brothers, Atari, and Lucasfilm laid the foundation for much of the medium's future.



## 6. “You must feel the Force around you!”

### Transmedia Play and the Death Star Trench Run in Star Wars Video Games

*Drew Morton*

The overlap between fan studies and Star Wars in all its multimedia incarnations seems to encourage academics to indulge in an autobiographical approach to the franchise. After all, George Lucas’s narrative universe evokes a range of emotions and personal reflections, from nostalgic memories of playing with action figures as a child to anger about the prequels and ongoing editorial changes Lucas has made to the original trilogy over the past decades. Like Henry Jenkins, Matt Hills, and Colin Harvey, I too cannot avoid the autobiographical impulse as a form of introduction—like the Death Star’s tractor beam, it just sucks me in—so allow me to be brief. In the summer of 1998, when I was fifteen years old, my appendix broke. I was misdiagnosed and went two weeks with a broken appendix before the doctors figured out what was wrong with me. Because of the misdiagnosis, I spent a month in the hospital having what I have since described as my “Martin Scorsese summer.” I went through the American Film Institute’s Top 100 Films from the comfort of my hospital bed and used the money from all the get-well cards to upgrade my computer so I could play *X-Wing Alliance* (1999).

Part of the game’s appeal was its status as one of the first Star Wars flight simulators with photorealistic 3D graphics that allowed players to pilot the *Millennium Falcon*. I remember hovering over the monitor with my friends as we watched from the crusty old ship cockpit as it went into hyperspace. It was as thrilling as the first time we played *Jedi Knight: Dark Forces II* (1997), a first-person shooter that allowed players to use a lightsaber and Force powers in such iconic settings as the carbonite freezing chamber from *The Empire Strikes Back*. I mention this because there is a tendency in studies of transmedia properties to emphasize narrative over play. Yet, to many video gamers, play is much more important than story.

I noticed this disjunction between media studies scholars and gamers when I was finishing my book on style as having transmedia properties.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Drew Morton, *Panel to the Screen: Style, American Film, and Comic Books During the Blockbuster Era* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2017), 21–39.

Specifically, if we look back at the seminal transmedia case study of *The Matrix* franchise and the *Enter the Matrix* video game, we can see a pragmatic gulf in how academics, gamers, and critics engaged with the game. While Henry Jenkins uses the franchise persuasively to build upon Marsha Kinder's work towards his theory of transmedia storytelling—the conception that integral narrative elements of a fictional world are dispersed systematically across multiple media platforms—gamers and popular critics focused on the gameplay.<sup>2</sup> As one reviewer noted, “it’s a little disappointing that the game does not allow you to play as the three coolest members of the *Matrix* universe [...] It would have been cool to take off through the city as Neo, or shoot it out with agents as Trinity.”<sup>3</sup> Similarly, Stephen Poole at *PC Gamer* asked, “But what’s with all the story? While some gamers will love to learn of Ghost’s existentialist leanings or his unique stance on celibacy, most would trade this knowledge for some kickass action—and this is where *Enter the Matrix* truly disappoints.”<sup>4</sup>

In both reviews, the critics voice a fairly common refrain that those familiar with video games based on film or television licenses can trace back to Atari’s historic *E.T.* debacle. Even when they are based on film properties, games are firstly meant to be playable. Narrative preoccupations aside, the quality of that gameplay and its reflection of the visceral spirit of the source text matters most. As Carle notes, his disappointment stems from not getting to *experience* the iconic “bullet time” of *The Matrix* from the perspective of one of the film’s main characters. Everything else—the story, the philosophy lessons, the characterization—is secondary. The purpose of this article is therefore to begin to formulate a theoretical and methodological approach to transmedia *as play* and apply the concept to Star Wars video games, specifically the space simulation/combat games that tend to return to the Death Star trench run, in the same way that fan studies scholars yield to their autobiographical impulses.

In order to take these initial steps, let us begin with the definition and usage of the term “transmedia play” up to this point. While Jenkins broadly alludes to the category in his 2011 blog post “Transmedia 202:

2 Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old Media and New Media Collide* (New York: NYU Press, 2006), 94.

3 Chris Carle, “*Enter the Matrix* Review,” *IGN*, May 20, 2003, accessed December 6, 2016, <http://www.ign.com/articles/2003/05/20/enter-the-matrix-review>.

4 Stephen Poole, review of *Enter the Matrix*, *PC Gamer*, August 2003, accessed December 6, 2016, [http://web.archive.org/web/20060315134412/http://www.pcgamer.com/archives/2005/07/enter\\_the\\_matri.html](http://web.archive.org/web/20060315134412/http://www.pcgamer.com/archives/2005/07/enter_the_matri.html).

Further Reflections," the term nevertheless remains elusive.<sup>5</sup> Colin Harvey's 2015 monograph *Fantastic Transmedia* traces the term back to 2008—to the work of game designer and theorist Stephen Dinehart. However, Dinehart's theorization merely states that the player

transforms the story via his or her own natural cognitive psychological abilities, and enables the Artwork to surpass medium. It is in transmedial play that the ultimate story agency, and decentralized authorship can be realized [...] The Artist authored transmedia elements act [as] a story guide for the inherently narratological nature of the human mind to become thought, both conscious and subconscious.<sup>6</sup>

To which natural cognitive psychological abilities is Dinehart alluding? How might the conclusions of a cognitive approach to video games or transmedia play differ from the work of other cognitivist scholars like David Bordwell and Edward Branigan? Dinehart never tells us (the above quotation is actually the bulk of the blog post). How does transmedial play differ from transmedia storytelling? Both provide narrative worlds for the types of community-based behaviors—"decentralized authorship"—that Jenkins already theorized. Needless to say, Dinehart's work does not carry the scholarly conversation very far due to its preference for unsubstantiated generalizations.

Additional scholarly work on the relationship between transmedia and play has been produced by Becky Herr-Stephenson, Meryl Alper, and Erin Reilly at the Annenberg Innovation Lab (in collaboration with Jenkins). But the research team's study is focused on how it can be utilized to enrich connected learning in children. The research team defines transmedia play as the exploration, enjoyment, and remixing of "elements from diverse media [...] This 'creative reworking' (in Jenkins' terms) allows children to tell new stories, work through problems, and share with others."<sup>7</sup> This conception provides a useful springboard that need not be specifically limited to children.

5 Henry Jenkins, "Transmedia 202: Further Reflections," *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*, August 1, 2011, accessed December 6, 2016, [http://henryjenkins.org/2011/08/defining\\_transmedia\\_further\\_re.html](http://henryjenkins.org/2011/08/defining_transmedia_further_re.html).

6 Stephen Dinehart, "Transmedial Play: Cognitive and Cross-Platform Narrative," *The Narrative Design Explorer*, May 14 2008, accessed December 6, 2016, <http://narrativedesign.org/2008/05/transmedial-play-cognitive-and-cross-platform-narrative/>.

7 Becky Herr-Stephenson, Meryl Alper, and Erin Reilly, *It is for Transmedia: Learning Through Transmedia* (Los Angeles, CA: USC Annenberg Innovation Lab, 2013), 10.



Think, for a moment, of Star Wars cosplay or a historical reenactment of a Civil War scene, two activities that tend to be prohibitive to children due to the cost of the costumes and props and the use of weaponry. Both, undoubtedly, are activities that rely on other media forms to create a narrative experience that is shared with others. Moreover, they are both social activities that are often performed in public venues, ranging from conventions to tourist locations. Sometimes those narrative experiences are new. When I encounter one of a handful of Darth Vader cosplayers at San Diego Comic-Con every year, the actors are not recreating scenes from the films, novels, or comics. While there may be performative punchlines like “The Force is strong with this one,” the bulk of the interactions are based around the cosplayer interacting with me as they assume Darth Vader would. Historical reenactment may differ in this regard based on the genre of practice: a reenactment of the battle of Gettysburg may not create a new narrative, while a living history might. In any case, we can see that, while the Annenberg scholars chose to focus on children, their theorization might also be useful for developing a theory of transmedia play on a broader scale.

So far, we can see that the Annenberg team’s conceptualization of transmedia play squares with Marsha Kinder and Jenkins’s work on transmedia as an experience that migrates across media platforms. But is it compatible with theories of play, specifically in relation to video games? According to Mark J.P. Wolf and Bernard Perron (who utilize an interdisciplinary toolbox in their foundational work in video game studies), the most fundamental elements of the video game are an algorithm, player activity, interface, and graphics.<sup>8</sup> Essentially, video games are a visual display of pixels (graphics) that respond to the player’s input (player activity) at the junction point between input and output (interface). Moreover, video games are defined by a set of procedures that are responsible for the game’s representations, responses to input, rules, and randomness (the algorithm).<sup>9</sup>

For Wolf and Perron, “player activity is arguably the heart of the video game experience [...] without player activity, there would be no game.”<sup>10</sup> This player activity takes place in a game world that presents itself as wholly separate from the real world. For game theorists like Roger Caillois and Johan Huizinga, the game world is a “second reality” that serves as

8 Mark J.P. Wolf and Bernard Perron, introduction to *The Video Game Theory Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 15.

9 Wolf and Perron, introduction to *Video Game Theory*, 16.

10 Wolf and Perron, introduction to *Video Game Theory*, 15.

the venue for player action.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, for Wolf, Perron, and theorist Alexander Galloway, there is a separation between the activities a player performs within the game (diegetic activity) and the physical actions performed outside the game, such as pressing a button, that are necessary to perform those diegetic activities (extradiegetic activity).<sup>12</sup> To illustrate, there is both an overlap and disjunction between actions taken in the real world (extradiegetic space) and the game world (diegetic space). A player performing a dance sequence in *Dance Dance Revolution* (1998) or piloting an X-Wing in the Star Wars arcade game performs abridged physical actions in comparison to their digital avatars.

Does the video game's algorithm therefore inhibit the exploration or remixing of media elements? To a certain extent, at least, it does. Most video games have spatial boundaries that confine player activity to a specific venue. For instance, you cannot go "outside" the maps of *Battlefront* (2015), nor can you pick Darth Vader or Luke Skywalker as your avatar (they only exist in the game as special power-ups that you can receive). Video games, like most new media, provide an illusion of choice based on a preexisting database of information that can be accessed via predetermined commands. However, boundaries and limitations tend to be inherent in the rules of any game—video or analog. Do video games allow players to work through problems? Absolutely. Most games are based around objectives from "get the most kills" to "navigate this space and avoid obstacles," and almost any multiplayer game, *Battlefront* included, relies on a social dimension (sharing with others) to achieve those predetermined goals. Moreover, players of *Battlefront* can explore the game's spaces and partake in such iconic events as the Battle of Hoth, the Battle of Endor, and the destruction of the first Death Star. Thus, Herr-Stephenson, Alper, and Reilly's conception of transmedia play can be extended to account for both a larger audience and play in the context of a video game.

The authors further note that transmedia play has five characteristics: mobility (movement of stories across platforms creates new meanings), accessibility (each world has a variety of starting points), replayability (large-scale experiences create high potential for multiple iterations), resourcefulness (encourages creative thinking about challenging situations or problems), and social interaction (play occurs in conversation with others).<sup>13</sup> I have

11 Alexander R. Galloway, *Gaming: Essays on Algorithmic Culture* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006), 6.

12 Wolf and Perron, introduction to *Video Game Theory*, 15. See also Galloway, *Gaming*, 7.

13 Galloway, *Gaming*, 27.

already engaged some of these points directly and indirectly. Transcribing the Death Star trench run from *A New Hope* to one of the many video games it appears in changes its meaning: the importance of the event is gleaned from one's knowledge of the film, while the immediacy of the first-person experience magnifies that importance. Yet, the opposite sequence of events could easily occur if a consumer played the video game before watching the film. I have already discussed how such games—particularly of the multiplayer variety—showcase both the resourceful and the social aspects that Herr-Stephenson, Alper, and Reilly describe. Moreover, a game need not be strictly multiplayer to encourage social behaviors. Arcade culture nurtured a certain type of public performance and tips, cheats, and exploits still migrate amongst the players of single-player games.

What I would like to focus on for the remainder of this brief essay is re-playability—the idea that transmedia play utilizes large-scale experiences to nurture the potential for multiple interactions. Transmedia storytelling is dependent upon the consumer's constant return to a narrative universe through its overlapping texts; consumers need to do homework and stay on top of story developments, which, in turn, enriches their understanding of the previously established texts and encourages re-consumption (think about how knowledge of *Shadows of the Empire* changes the establishing shots of Mos Eisley in the special edition of *A New Hope* when we see Dash Rendar's ship fly across the sky). Enjoyment arises in consumers when they can make these textual linkages, which goes back to Jenkins's theorization of transmedia storytelling as having a dimension of “additive comprehension.”<sup>14</sup> For Jenkins, one of the narrative goals of transmedia storytelling is that creators can re-consume texts while adding newly acquired knowledge to “shift your perception.”<sup>15</sup> To phrase it another way, transmedia play can shift the consumer's perception towards visceral pleasures. So what is it about the Death Star trench run that keeps players coming back? The iconic sequence that serves as the proving ground for the climax of *A New Hope* has been remediated and recreated in video games ranging from the 1983 Atari arcade game to the 1993 desktop titles *Rebel Assault* and *X-Wing*, and more recently in the 2009 iOS and Unity title *Trench Run* and 2015's *Star Wars Battlefront*.<sup>16</sup> If the Force is a constant of the Star Wars universe,

14 Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old Media and New Media Collide* (New York: NYU Press, 2006), 123.

15 Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 123.

16 For clarity and concision, I will now refer to this title as “the 2015 *Battlefront*.”

the trench run seems to be the equivalent for Star Wars video games,<sup>17</sup> thus making it a prime example of replayability.

Jenkins provides a useful lens for contemplating the joys of replayability in his article "Games, the New Lively Art." The article advocates the embrace of critic Gilbert Seldes's distinction between "great arts," which "seek to express universal and timeless values," and "lively arts," which "seek to give shape and form to immediate experiences and impressions. [Seldes] values affect over intellect, immediate impact over long-term consequences, the spontaneous impulse over the calculated effect."<sup>18</sup> Thus, Jenkins largely avoids the foundational theoretical skirmishes around ludic or narrative approaches to video games in order to advocate for the investigation of the pleasurable, the emotional, and the subjective. For instance, Seldes describes what Jenkins terms and describes as "memorable moments":

the pleasures of finding peak experiences within otherwise banal works. [They] don't simply depend on spectacle. After all, spectacle refers to something that stops you dead in your tracks, forces you to stand and look. Game play becomes memorable when it creates the opposite effect—when it makes you want to move, when it convinces you that you really are in charge of what's happening in the game.<sup>19</sup>

In other words, memorable moments are illustrated by the times you played the 2015 *Battlefront* and, tricked into seeing and feeling past the interface as a bridge between extradiegetic space and the *Millennium Falcon*, started rocking your body in sync with each turn and swerve of the ship. As Jenkins later notes, the phenomenological closure created by good game design, a functional interface, and an adept player prompts many players to conflate the two spaces as being one and the same. He writes that we act as if we have "unmediated access to the fictional space. We refer to our game characters in the first person and act as if their experiences" are our own.<sup>20</sup> Of course, the lynchpin in this relationship is game design that aids the player in making that conflation. Gamers can become more adept as they play a game (the progression system embedded in most games demands that they do) and broken controllers can be fixed, but poor game design was a

17 For a contextual media-industrial history of Star Wars video games and LucasArts, see Stefan Hall's chapter in this volume.

18 Henry Jenkins, "Games, the New Lively Art" *Henry Jenkins: Blog*, April 3, 2010, accessed December 13, 2016, <http://web.mit.edu/21fms/People/henry3/GamesNewLively.html>.

19 Jenkins, "Games, the New Lively Art."

20 Jenkins, "Games, the New Lively Art."

relative constant in games made before the 2000s (2003 saw the launch of the first console patch). So how do game designers assist in the process of making us feel like we're fighting like Luke Skywalker, like we're piloting the *Millennium Falcon* as Han Solo?

In the case of the Death Star downloadable content (DLC) for *Star Wars Battlefront*, it does so predominantly through a staged progression that combines a variety of gameplay modes with an epic scope. The centerpiece of the DLC is a game mode entitled "Battle Station" that involves three stages, culminating—once again—in the trench run. The first stage pits Rebel and Imperial star fleets against one another as the former attempt to blow up the latter's Star Destroyers. The mode allows for either first-person or third-person camera placement, while players can temporarily take control of unique bonuses like Boba Fett's *Slave I* or the *Millennium Falcon* in order to give their teams an advantage. If the Rebels' assault succeeds, the mode progresses to the second stage: the rescue. Unlike the first stage, the second takes the guise of a first-person shooter in which the Rebels must escort R2-D2 from the depths of the Death Star's corridors to a docking bay so the droid can be rescued. Like the first stage, the second allows players to briefly take on such familiar characters as Bossk, Chewbacca, and the Emperor (complete with Force powers and unique abilities) to sway the battle in their favor. If R2-D2 is rescued, the final stage—the trench run—is triggered, and three Rebel players are randomly selected to make the attempted run while the others protect them and act as a diversion. Like the first stage, the player can choose a first- or third-person camera and can take part in the battle as Luke, Han, or Darth Vader.

Obviously, this transposition of *A New Hope*'s most iconic sequence differs from the canonized narrative. The Star Destroyer attack stage owes more to the finale of *Return of the Jedi*, while the R2-D2 docking bay rescue seems cribbed from the beginning of *Revenge of the Sith*. But the alternation between flight simulator attack-and-defense stages and a first-person shooter stage provides the DLC with a sense of dramatic stakes and scale. Part of this stems from the temporal investment players must make while playing the mode. Altogether, the mode can take up to half an hour to complete (much longer than the usual six- to ten-minute round of team deathmatch). Thus, if the Rebels fail in the second stage, they have to repeat the first all over again. If they run out of time during the trench run, they also lose. Another difference between the game design and the film, of course, is that these stages do not take place simultaneously. In *A New Hope*, the cross-cutting between the Rebel base on Yavin, Grand Moff Tarkin targeting the Rebel base on the Death Star, Luke Skywalker's X-Wing attack, and Vader's pursuit

created both dramatic stakes and suspense. However, the implementation of such precise coordination would undoubtedly make for an extremely complicated gameplay experience.

The second stage of the DLC therefore focuses on creating a sense of scale, in particular making the Death Star *feel* real by making the iconic space explorable and by giving it a tangible quality. One corridor, for example, leads to the trash compactor that almost killed our heroes, while another leads to the shield generators that Obi-Wan Kenobi deactivated. By the time the third stage inevitably comes around, the Death Star has a physical volume and depth for both teams of players. As *Forbes* contributor Todd Kenreck writes, the end result is "that you feel like you are in the movies" when you see dozens of stormtroopers go into battle against the Rebels.<sup>21</sup> Fittingly, Kenreck also focuses on the experiential pleasures of the DLC, writing: "It is definitely a wish fulfillment piece of DLC. Being able to fly down the trenches of the Death Star as Darth Vader is pretty much a dream come true."<sup>22</sup> As in the gameplay of *Enter the Matrix*, the story is secondary whereas the transmedia play, the experience of *being* Darth Vader and Luke Skywalker, is everything.

My analysis of the dimensional, transmedial space of the Death Star and how it creates enhanced dramatic significance in the 2015 *Battlefront* dovetails with another concept by Jenkins that proves useful for examining transmedia play—games as evocative spaces. In "Game Design as Narrative Architecture," Jenkins encourages a compromise between the dueling camps of ludologists and narratologists that examines "games less as stories than as spaces ripe with narrative possibility."<sup>23</sup> A productive route for reaching this middle ground is by analyzing video games as "evocative spaces," similar to that of theme park attractions that "build upon stories or genre traditions already well known to visitors, allowing them to enter physically into spaces they have visited many times before in their fantasies."<sup>24</sup> Fittingly, Jenkins cites game scholar and ludologist Jesper Juul, who argues that "you clearly can't deduct the story of *Star Wars* from *Star*

21 Todd Kenreck, "Star Wars: Battlefront's Death Star DLC Has An Absurd Amount of Polish," *Forbes*, September 28, 2016, accessed December 13, 2016, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/toddkenreck/2016/09/28/star-wars-battlefronts-death-star-dlc-has-an-absurd-amount-polish/>.

22 Kenreck, "Death Star DLC."

23 Henry Jenkins, "Game Design as Narrative Architecture," in *The Game Design Reader: A Rules of Play Anthology*, eds. Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), 672.

24 Jenkins, "Game Design," 677.

*Wars* the game.”<sup>25</sup> For Jenkins, who was on the cusp of his pioneering work on transmedia storytelling, this is too restrictive a conception of narrative (he was writing this in 2005). The gift of *Star Wars* video games is the fact that the player comes into them with a previously established understanding of the narrative and that they enrich our engagement with a larger universe by giving “concrete shape to our memories and imaginings of the storyworld, creating an immersive environment we can wander through and interact with.”<sup>26</sup> In short, gamers unfamiliar with the films or *Star Wars* universe may not engage in transmedia play when encountering an evocative space like the carbonite chamber or the Death Star for the first time. They may get enjoyment from the games—similar to that of a person who is first introduced to *Star Wars* via an ancillary offshoot—but I would guess that the “wish fulfillment” aspect would be lost on these gamers to a great degree (depending on their familiarity with the franchise and its world via other intertextual and paratextual sources).

While we’ve analyzed a contemporary *Star Wars* game in relation to the concepts of memorable moments and—indirectly—evocative spaces, let us now return to the origin of our case study: the 1983 Atari arcade game designed by Mike Hally. The Atari game was composed of 3D color vector graphics and featured what were cutting-edge digital sound cues at the time. We hear a lo-res rendition of John Williams’s iconic score. We can hear samples of the voices of Alec Guinness, James Earl Jones, Harrison Ford, and the growls of Chewbacca and beeps of R2-D2. The elaborately decorated cockpit cabinet for the interface features stickers and faux computer screens to give the player the impression that they are piloting an X-Wing on the way to save Yavin 4 from certain destruction. In short, the physical interface itself—not just the game—aids substantially in the creation of an evocative space. Fittingly, Jenkins quotes Don Carson, a senior show designer for Walt Disney Imagineering, who writes that “every sound you play, every turn in the road should reinforce the concept” and the “physical space [...] does much of the work.”<sup>27</sup> Thus, the various aesthetic embellishments on the interface itself, the music, and the sound effects go a long way in sowing the seeds of illusion and creating that “second reality” that game theorists describe. But how do we, as players, overcome one of the biggest perceived obstacles on our path toward complete immersion: the lack of photorealistic

25 Jenkins, “Game Design,” 677.

26 Jenkins, “Game Design,” 678.

27 Jenkins, “Game Design,” 676.



graphics? How do we align ourselves with Luke Skywalker if TIE fighters look like rudimentary sketches?

I should note that I do not personally ascribe to this popular assumption of video-game play. Of course, I have felt shock and awe in moments of realist beauty in video games—for example, the exit from the vault in *Fallout 3* (2008); the experiences of roaming the Wild West in *Red Dead Redemption* (2010); or the uncanny sensation of driving around a spatially abridged version of my LA neighborhood in *Grand Theft Auto V* (2013). However, I still find playing *Super Mario Bros.* (1983) engaging despite the fact that two-dimensional platform games do not offer the same kind of visual realism. That being said, the evolution of graphics-generating hardware towards greater visual realism has driven both the aesthetic norms of game design and gamer expectations. But realism is, as always, contingent upon historical context. For instance, the photorealist computer-generated imagery of *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991) and *Jurassic Park* (1993) today tends to be met by my students with laughter. I say this because while Atari's *Star Wars* may not look "real" to us in 2016, it certainly was good enough for gamers in the early 1980s. As Dan Plotkin writes in a *Compute!* review of the game, the 3D wire diagrams give "such an excellent illusion of depth," while the "digitized sound" and controls make the Death Star sequence "breathtaking."<sup>28</sup> In other words, rudimentary wire graphics served their immersive purpose at the time. But I would like to add one more aesthetic piece to this puzzle.

Consider the Death Star trench run in its original cinematic context. As I have described, George Lucas cross-cuts between multiple points of view. We watch as the Rebel attack squadron dispatches TIE fighters during their approach to the trench. Similarly, we watch as the Rebel military leaders monitor the alignment of the Death Star's destructive laser beam from their own location on Yavin 4. One of the main tools in all of these settings is a computer: the Rebel leaders trace the trajectory of the laser with a gigantic, computerized war-room table, while the rival forces dogfight with the aid of targeting computers. The targeting computers in both the X-wings and TIE fighters are lo-res representations constructed out of rudimentary 3D vector graphics.

In both instances, we see the Death Star trench represented by lo-res vector graphics and a z-axis vanishing point. To borrow from the work of Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, the film remediates the computer in order to give players the sensation that they are in the position of Luke Skywalker;

28 Dan Plotkin, "ST Star Wars," *Compute!*, July 1988, 51.



the arcade game does the inverse. It remediates the graphics of the targeting computer to give us a similar illusion.<sup>29</sup> However, this admittedly simplistic analysis overlooks one key difference between the two representations. For, when we see the targeting computer in *A New Hope*, it is in the context of one of the film's many point-of-view shots. Luke looks into his eyepiece while flying and sees the digitized representation as being outside the confines of the ship, ahead of the X-Wing. The Atari game, on the other hand, gives us a point-of-view shot from the cockpit. In other words, the film separates the view from the ship and the view from the targeting computer while the Atari game equates them. Nevertheless, both representations of the trench run—the cinematic and the vector graphic—utilize a subjective, computer-mediated point of view. The latter, when paired with the ornate cabinet of the arcade game, creates an evocative space that, to return to Jenkins, conveys “new narrative experiences through its creative manipulation of environmental details.”<sup>30</sup>

## Coda

In this chapter, I have begun to explore the concept of transmedia play as initially outlined by Becky Herr-Stephenson, Meryl Alper, and Erin Reilly as the exploration, enjoyment, and remixing of “elements from diverse media. [...] This ‘creative reworking’ (in Jenkins’s terms) allows children to tell new stories, work through problems, and share with others.”<sup>31</sup> In so doing, I have broadened their conception of transmedia play beyond children and connected learning to consumers of all ages and to the context of Star Wars video games in particular. Specifically, I have argued that replayability—one of Herr-Stephenson, Alper, and Reilly’s qualities of transmedia play—can be nurtured and magnified by Henry Jenkins’s conceptions of video games as providing “memorable moments” and “evocative spaces” with regard to the Death Star trench run in both the 2015 *Battlefront* and the 1983 Atari game. As an initial step in conceiving transmedia as having a playful quality, I have attempted to use Jenkins’s own work on video games to elaborate on his tangentially associated theories of transmedia storytelling out of a desire to acknowledge the long shadow of his influence.

29 Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), 45.

30 Jenkins, “Game Design,” 678.

31 Herr-Stephenson, Alper, and Reilly, *T is for Transmedia*, 10.

However, my account and methodological toolbox should not be interpreted as being the only lens for such an analysis. As Obi-Wan once said, "What I told you was true ... from a certain point of view." I eagerly look forward to evolution in this area of inquiry and would suggest that scholarship based on cultural memory, performance studies, and reenactment may provide a fruitful supplement to the larger projects of media franchising, transmedia world-building, and cultural studies.



# Part II

“Never Tell Me the Odds!”:

Expanding the Star Wars Universe



## 7. Transmedia Character Building

### Textual Crossovers in the Star Wars Universe

*Lincoln Geraghty*

As the other chapters in this collection attest, Star Wars is a prime example both of contemporary transmedia storytelling and of media franchising. The story and brand spread across multiple media platforms and textual commodities, driven by the ongoing battle between the forces of good and evil. Star Wars is a “commercial supersystem of transmedia intertextuality,” or what Henry Jenkins, Marc Steinberg, and Colin B. Harvey, among others, have more recently described as the phenomenon of transmedia storytelling: a strategy informing the creation and development of mega-franchises like Star Wars through the dispersal of one storyworld across multiple media platforms.<sup>1</sup> Transmedia storytelling and accompanying media franchising contribute to how Hollywood builds on its filmic output, ensuring longevity and financial success well beyond the first iteration of a text. For Derek Johnson, whereas “transmedia storytelling suggests cultural artistry and participatory culture, ‘franchising’ calls equal if not more attention to corporate structure and the economic organization of that productive labor.”<sup>2</sup> In this chapter, I broaden Johnson’s discussion of the relationship between transmedia storytelling and media franchising to analyze recent developments in the Star Wars storyworld.

More specifically, I argue that certain characters throughout the history of the franchise have been used as transmedia signposts, directing audiences to other media texts that surround the original movies. As a result, they have become important signifiers of Star Wars’s transmedia history, carriers of inherent narrative meaning and objects of fan-cultural value. For example, Boba Fett began as an animated character in the *Holiday Special*

<sup>1</sup> Marsha Kinder, *Playing with Power in Movies, Television and Video Games: From Muppet Babies to Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), 3; Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006); Colin B. Harvey, *Fantastic Transmedia: Narrative Play and Memory Across Science Fiction and Fantasy Storyworlds* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2015); Marc Steinberg, *Anime’s Media Mix: Franchising Toys and Characters in Japan* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> Derek Johnson, *Media Franchising: Creative License and Collaboration in the Culture Industries* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 33.

(1978), then made his first film appearance in *The Empire Strikes Back*, and was later added back into the 1997 special edition re-release of *A New Hope*. Since the 1990s, his backstory has been fleshed out in novels and comics as well as in the prequel films and animated series, *The Clone Wars* and *Rebels*. Characters such as Darth Maul, Ahsoka Tano, Grand Admiral Thrawn, and Saw Gerrera either debuted in the films and moved to other platforms or were created as spin-off characters in novels and television to later appear in films and series. The regular remediation of such characters, joining the different media together, suggests that the Star Wars transmedia storyworld is both flexible and reflexive. These characters have been transformed and reimaged to fit the transmedia narrative at different stages of its evolution over the last 40 years while also acting as catalysts for new stories and new franchising opportunities.

Disney's announcement in 2014 that the canon was to be reset in order to make the six original films and *The Clone Wars* and *Rebels* television series "immoveable objects" in the narrative universe, from which new stories and texts would originate, underscores their strategy to rebuild Star Wars for a new generation.<sup>3</sup> In anticipation of the release of *The Force Awakens*, the resetting of the canon and creation of the Lucasfilm Story Group cleared the slate and deleted previously established characters, such as Luke and Leia's respective Jedi offspring, so as to introduce similar characters such as Rey (assumed by many to be Luke's daughter) and Kylo Ren (Ben Solo). But, where Disney was originally criticized for abandoning the EU and keystone antagonists like Thrawn, it is now reusing old fan favorites to shape the universe for new audiences. As a corporate licensor, Disney is keenly aware that it has to extend the franchise for future storytelling while playfully engaging with its past. New toys, novels, guidebooks, comics, video games, films, and television series all contribute to a complex narrative network of Star Wars texts. Key characters in effect represent those "immoveable objects" when used strategically in marketing campaigns. They become texts in themselves: synecdochal signifiers of the Star Wars transmedia universe. For Jenkins, "the core aesthetic impulses behind good transmedia works are world-building and seriality."<sup>4</sup> Iconic characters in the Star Wars universe are integral to this process since they help to establish the fictional

3 "The Legendary Star Wars Expanded Universe Turns A New Page," *StarWars.com*, April 25, 2014, accessed May 8, 2017, <http://www.starwars.com/news/the-legendary-star-wars-expanded-universe-turns-a-new-page>.

4 Henry Jenkins, "The Aesthetics of Transmedia: In Response to David Bordwell (Part Two)," *Confessions of an Aca-Fan: The Official Weblog of Henry Jenkins*, September 13, 2009, accessed May 8, 2017, [http://henryjenkins.org/2009/09/the\\_aesthetics\\_of\\_transmedia\\_i\\_1.html](http://henryjenkins.org/2009/09/the_aesthetics_of_transmedia_i_1.html).

world and aid in the serialization of the fictional narrative. William Proctor and Matthew Freeman describe this relationship between marketing, merchandise, and the text as the “transmedia economy” of Star Wars.<sup>5</sup> This chapter therefore highlights the interconnected nature of corporate production, fan consumption, and transmedia world-building in the context of cross-platform character development.

Marc Steinberg’s discussion of what he terms anime’s “media mix” provides a helpful framework for understanding what has happened with new and established characters throughout the transmedia history of Star Wars. Media mix, as a “term for the cross-media serialization and circulation of entertainment franchises,” shares much with Henry Jenkins’s examination of contemporary convergence culture.<sup>6</sup> However, Steinberg traces a longer history of the term, suggesting that it starts with the emergence of anime on Japanese television in the 1960s. More than a style, anime is a mode of cultural production and consumption in which animated characters and franchises mix and merge across media platforms. Audience consumption of these franchises and animated characters is not only about possession (purchasing and collecting merchandise and images) but also about participation. Thus, according to Steinberg,

the anime media mix simultaneously creates (1) the character merchandise as material object, (2) the world to which the character merchandise belongs, and (3) the character as immaterial connective agent guaranteeing the consistency of this ever-expanding world.<sup>7</sup>

Before the Disney era, we see evidence of this media mix in how Lucas and Lucasfilm continually manipulated the Star Wars narrative, promoted it through proliferation of merchandising, and expanded the potential for transmedia storytelling through the continual retelling and reordering of individual characters and their histories. In the following analysis of transmedia crossovers, I look at three specific characters in detail: Boba Fett, Darth Maul, and Grand Admiral Thrawn. These characters represent different iterations and time periods in the Star Wars franchise: Fett is from the original trilogy and has existed in various literary versions since the

5 William Proctor and Matthew Freeman, “‘The First Step into a *Smaller World*’: The Transmedia Economy of *Star Wars*,” in *Revisiting Imaginary Worlds: A Subcreation Studies Anthology*, ed. Mark J.P. Wolf (New York: Routledge, 2016), 223.

6 Steinberg, *Anime’s Media Mix*, viii.

7 Steinberg, *Anime’s Media Mix*, 200.



beginning; Maul is from the prequel trilogy and has undergone some very recent changes in appearance and characterization in animated spin-offs; and Thrawn, originally created in the EU following the original trilogy, has now been reincorporated into the canon post-Disney. Moreover, all three characters are notionally villains and thus serve as regular dramatic foils in various media versions of the Star Wars metatext: Fett as bounty hunter routinely pursues main protagonists such as Luke and Han Solo; Maul carries a vendetta against Obi-Wan Kenobi; and Thrawn serves as overarching nemesis of the whole Rebel Alliance. These crossover characters have also been especially popular amongst fans, pointing to their longevity and importance to the overall Star Wars universe.

### Boba Fett: Perennial Antagonist

Boba Fett epitomizes Lucasfilm's original attempts to rewrite backstory through transmedial migration, as Lucas manipulated his core characters to establish and to expand the Star Wars universe. With his story as peripheral bounty hunter turned genetic progeny of the clone army, Fett highlights Lucas's original strategy for expanding the narratives of incidental characters. While *The Empire Strikes Back* was his first canonical appearance, his animated form seen in the *Holiday Special* preceded this and became part of the paratextual infrastructure surrounding the marketing and merchandising of *A New Hope* following its 1977 release. His animated form acted as an unofficial introduction to the character, depicting him as a bounty hunter employed by Darth Vader to find Luke, Leia, and Han, and thereby foreshadowing his eventual role in *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*. With the remastered re-release of the original trilogy in 1997 in anticipation of *The Phantom Menace*, Fett was inserted into *A New Hope*. His presence in Mos Eisley, during the scene in which Jabba the Hutt confronts Han Solo, retroactively asserts his presence throughout the original trilogy. Lucas likely included Fett in this deleted scene from *A New Hope* because he had very quickly become a cult favorite for action figure collectors.<sup>8</sup> However, Fett also had several EU stories, novels, and comics devoted to fleshing out his backstory so that Fett's insertion into

8 Such action figures "underscore the plural in [Star Wars], declaring the central frame and theme to be that of a never-ending series of grand and cosmic battles of mythic proportions." Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 180.

*A New Hope* works to substantiate and build upon the growing mythos surrounding the secretive and unmasked antihero, while at the same time asserting Lucas's authorship.

Lucas as author is again emphasized in the prequels, particularly in *Attack of the Clones*, wherein audiences learn about Fett's origin: he is a clone of the bounty hunter Jango Fett, who dons the same Mandalorian armor and raises the clone as his son. The story of Jango's clone-son was later developed and expanded throughout five seasons of *The Clone Wars*; Boba Fett's relationships with other well-known bounty hunters, such as Bossk, became central storylines and bred familiarity for those wanting to know more about his eventual journey to becoming Han Solo's nemesis. Before *Attack of the Clones* and *The Clone Wars*, Fett's off-screen life is explored in a series of short stories published as part of the *Tales* series edited by Kevin J. Anderson. In "A Barve Like That: The Tale of Boba Fett" by J.D. Montgomery, published in *Tales from Jabba's Palace*, readers learn that Fett survives his plunge into the Sarlacc Pit in *Return of the Jedi*.<sup>9</sup> Montgomery, writing as Daniel Keys Moran, follows this up in "The Last One Standing: The Tale of Boba Fett" published in *Tales of the Bounty Hunters*; Montgomery presents Fett as a one-time lawman, a sympathetic version of the determined and haunted loner.<sup>10</sup> Working to add depth to the character, while not necessarily making sense in terms of the narrative timeline, these textual examples of Fett's transmedia narrative are indicative of what Andrew J. Friedenthal calls the phenomenon of "retroactive continuity," more commonly abbreviated as "retconning."<sup>11</sup> He argues that, while cinematic blockbuster franchises now "utilize the complexity of their fictional universes in order to refresh the narratives and maintain audience interest across multiple platforms," this strategy has its roots in the comic-book industry.<sup>12</sup> As Fett's ever-growing transmedia story spans a number of texts across different media platforms—comics, novels, games, television and films—individual authors adapt the character to fit plot, medium, and merchandising opportunities.

Giving Fett an origin story in *Attack of the Clones*, however, in no way devalues what came before—neither in the original films nor in the EU.

9 J.D. Montgomery, "A Barve Like That: The Tale of Boba Fett," in *Tales from Jabba's Palace*, ed. Kevin J. Anderson (New York: Bantam Books, 1996).

10 Daniel Keys Moran (J.D. Montgomery), "The Last One Standing: The Tale of Boba Fett," in *Tales of the Bounty Hunters*, ed. Kevin J. Anderson (New York: Bantam Books, 1996).

11 Andrew J. Friedenthal, *Retcon Game: Retroactive Continuity and the Hyperlinking of America* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2017), 7.

12 Friedenthal, *Retcon Game*, 10.

New insights into the character do not start his story over again, as with a reboot, but rather add depth to what fans already perceive as a complicated and important backstory. The subtle changes to Fett—for example, his voice being redubbed in the original trilogy for the 2004 DVD re-release so it matches Jango Fett’s from the prequels—are for continuity and are not meant to redraw the character, although many fans felt this was further evidence of Lucas tinkering too much. This example serves to unite the various iterations of Fett depicted over the 40-year history of the franchise, while familiarizing the character to contemporary audiences.

In his analysis of comic-book reboots, William Proctor argues that “the retcon differs from the reboot in the sense that it alters elements of a series’ chronology without collapsing the narrative continuum altogether.”<sup>13</sup> What has happened over time with Boba Fett is a continuous and purposeful attempt to draw and redraw the character to fit with new story developments. Because he proved to be so popular in paratexts, his constant presence needs to be tied into the overall filmic story arc while at the same time remaining as true to the character’s established personality traits as possible. The retconning of Fett has therefore meant that he is able to move from new text to old text and back again with little disruption to the canon.

## Darth Maul: From Prequel to Sequel

Unlike Boba Fett, who became an instant fan favorite in spite of his brief appearances, the relatively little screen time given to Darth Maul in *The Phantom Menace* endeared him neither to critics nor to fans. Indeed, Todd McCarthy for *Variety* said in his review of the film, “As the most widely anticipated and heavily hyped film of modern times [...] [it] can scarcely help being a letdown on some levels, but it’s too bad that it disappoints on so many.” Maul gets only a brief mention, because he “doesn’t say much but proves to be a particularly dexterous opponent of the jedi[s].”<sup>14</sup> Even now, some fan websites reflect upon his rather lackluster dialogue and ignominious death in the first prequel, citing the lack of original character development as one of the main reasons for their intense dislike.

13 William Proctor, “Ctl-Alt-Del: Retcon, Relaunch, or Reboot?” *Sequart*, February 8, 2013, accessed May 8, 2017, <http://sequart.org/magazine/18508/clt-alt-del-retcon-relauncg-or-reboot/>.

14 Todd McCarthy, “Review: ‘Star Wars: Episode I—The Phantom Menace,’” *Variety*, May 10, 1999, accessed May 15, 2017, <http://variety.com/1999/film/reviews/star-wars-episode-i-the-phantom-menace-1117499730/>.

But Maul's death at the end of *The Phantom Menace* was not the last fans saw of the character. Indeed, in the years since *The Phantom Menace*, Maul has become a cross-series regular. I want to consider in this section how his character has survived criticism to emerge as a pivotal character for new storytelling. As with many villains, his backstory was first fleshed out in the EU, which gave insight into his training by Darth Sidious and filled in some of the gaps between his apprenticeship and his final mission to kill Qui-Gon and Obi-Wan. Many of his stories appeared in the Dark Horse comics, particularly in an anthology of short stories called *Star Wars: Visionaries* (2005). This follows in the tradition of the *Tales* series of books published in the 1990s: a compilation of shorter vignettes focusing on background characters that expand the storyworld. The fact that his legs and torso were separated in the film did not stop author Aaron McBride from writing about Maul's search for revenge in the comics story "Old Wounds," which depicted him with robotic legs and larger cranial horns seeking revenge against the Jedi after *Revenge of the Sith*, only to die at the hands of Owen Lars on Tatooine.<sup>15</sup>

"Old Wounds" proved prophetic, since the writers of *The Clone Wars* later bring him back from the dead, give him new cybernetic implants and legs, and set him on a journey first to serve his old master again but then to seek out both Sidious and Obi-Wan in the animated series. Over seasons four and five of *The Clone Wars* and season two of *Rebels*, Maul's character becomes as much a victim of the Emperor's plans as the Jedi. A confrontation in *The Clone Wars* between master and former apprentice almost ends Maul's life for a second time and pushes him to seek revenge on all those who have done him wrong. In season three of *Rebels*, he is given the chance to confront and kill Obi-Wan on Tatooine, who is himself in hiding and keeping watch over an infant Luke, but Maul ultimately succumbs to the superior swordsmanship of the older Jedi.

This new death scene adds much more weight to his character following his first defeat in the prequel, this time passing away in the arms of his nemesis and wishing for the Chosen One (a reference to Luke) to avenge them both. Over the course of both animated series, Maul becomes a more clearly drawn character, rather than just a henchman for the Dark Side, and his narrative is rewritten to allow greater agency and physical freedom. The relationship between canonical and non-canonical versions of the character also adds importance, as his story becomes much more

15 Aaron McBride, "Old Wounds," in *Star Wars: Visionaries*, ed. Jeremy Barlow (Milwaukie, OR: Dark Horse Comics, 2005).

complex in the spin-off novels and comics. Moreover, while non-canonical stories such as “Old Wounds” do not fit within the official narrative now endorsed by Disney, they continue to have an impact, since they are referred to as inspiration for the creation of content in the animated series: on *StarWars.com*, for example, concept work by McBride for his “Old Wounds” version of Maul is placed beside the final design used in *The Clone Wars* episode “Revenge.”<sup>16</sup>

This joining together of two or more iterations of the transmedia franchise works to legitimize the narrative universe in which the story is set. Darth Maul’s appearances on both animated series indicate that they are as much a part of the fictional history as the original films, but also represent the larger fantasy to which one must refer for new textual knowledge about the character. Moreover, Maul’s reintroduction to the Star Wars canon works to rehabilitate the character following his disappointing reception in 1999. This storytelling trait is not unique to Star Wars and can again be found in comic book superhero narratives, where the integrity of the characters depends upon the existence of a universe in which all the characters owned by a particular company inhabit the same fictional world.<sup>17</sup> In Star Wars’s case, the larger stories that see the Republic on the brink of destruction are made more urgent for the audience because once peripheral and underappreciated characters become important and interesting in their own right; their threat is not restricted to just one series or even one plotline and Maul’s importance as a recurring character is re-emphasized through cycles of marketing and merchandising opportunities.

## Grand Admiral Thrawn: Heir to the Spin-off

Darth Maul is an example of how a character shifted from film to books and comics and eventually to television. Even when stories like “Old Wounds” were declared part of the Legends imprint and therefore non-canonical by Disney’s Story Group standards, his character had already been given new official life in stories written for the first animated series. Thanks to these appearances and a renewed cybernetic body, fans have reclaimed the character as one of the more popular; charting him at number sixteen on the

16 “Revenge Trivia Gallery,” *StarWars.com*, accessed May 8, 2017, [www.starwars.com/tv-shows/clone-wars/revenge-trivia-gallery](http://www.starwars.com/tv-shows/clone-wars/revenge-trivia-gallery).

17 Richard Reynolds, *Super Heroes: A Modern Mythology* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1992), 37–38.

all-time greatest Star Wars characters list published by *IGN* in 2010.<sup>18</sup> On that same list, EU character Grand Admiral Thrawn appears at number ten. This is evidence of the continuing significance of the EU for fans—characters one to nine on the list were all from the original trilogy—and is illustrative of the importance of “peripheral” characters and stories to the metatextual Star Wars universe. Thrawn first appeared as the new villain, replacing the Emperor, in the Thrawn trilogy of novels (1991-1993) written by Timothy Zahn, set five years after the events of *Return of the Jedi*. An additional two novels by Zahn, *Specter of the Past* (1997) and *Vision of the Future* (1998), give readers more insight into his origins and relationship with the Emperor. As with Maul, his physical appearance (blue skin, red eyes) and characterization as being more imposing than Darth Vader made him a popular choice for adaptations and even a range of action figures.

Thrawn first appeared as a liminal character, very much at the periphery of canonical texts, made physical only through merchandise before the release of *The Phantom Menace*, and then relegated to Legends status after Disney reset the narrative. But he reemerged as central to the developments depicted in *Rebels* season three (2016-2017), in charge of eradicating the Rebel threat to the Empire between *Revenge of the Sith* and *A New Hope*. Dave Filoni, executive producer of the series, revealed Thrawn's introduction to season three at the London *Star Wars Celebration* in 2016—receiving a huge reaction from fans. This was quickly followed up by the announcement that Zahn, original creator of the character, would pen an official novel entitled *Thrawn*, which would rewrite Thrawn's origin story to fit with the new version on *Rebels*—thereby retconning Thrawn, like Boba Fett and Maul, to fit the new Disney era. However, whilst canon again seems to take precedence over legend, Filoni's decision to integrate Thrawn into *Rebels* replicates why the character was created by Zahn for the EU in the first place; namely, as a new dramatic foil for the Rebel Alliance. As Filoni put it, “There's no one to defend [the Rebels] against Thrawn. We want to treat him like a big time villain as much as Darth Vader, but on the strategic, military side of things.” Bringing him back into the spotlight was clearly a long-term plan: “Thrawn was always on the list.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, the Legends still have an impact on Disney's version of Star Wars, as the metatext starts to

18 “Darth Maul #16,” *IGN*, accessed May 8, 2017, <https://web.archive.org/web/20120529123632/http://www.ign.com:80/star-wars-characters/16.html>.

19 Qtd. in Daniel Krupa and Eric Goldman, “Star Wars Celebration 2016: *Rebels* Will Treat Thrawn as a Vader-Level Threat,” *IGN*, July 17, 2016, accessed May 8, 2017, <http://www.ign.com/articles/2016/07/17/star-wars-celebration-2016-rebels-will-treat-thrawn-as-a-vader-level-threat>.

accommodate all versions of a character previously spread across different generations and different media platforms.

Star Wars as a long-standing franchise and Thrawn as one of the numerous characters born from within are clearly subject to such flow across media, and through Disney's own network of conglomerated outlets (television channels, movie studios, theme parks, etc.), their audience is potentially infinite. As Henry Jenkins asserts, convergence allows for the archival of and search for new forms of entertainment in which "the flow of content across multiple media platforms" links the web with older media forms such as film and television.<sup>20</sup> Yet Disney cannot do this alone. To spread its newly acquired IP as far and wide as possible—in different forms and formats—it has undertaken a series of partnerships to benefit from the creative talent and energy offered by production companies, toy manufacturers, and publishers. For Jennifer Holt, post-1970s industrial "integration" resulted in synergy that drove media production and, thus, we can see how the integrated strategies of Disney working with creators like Filoni on new Star Wars projects such as *Rebels* diversify potential markets.<sup>21</sup> Contemporary media conglomerates seek to maintain their brands through strategies epitomized by the media franchise, transforming all culture into valuable IP.

In the case of Star Wars and the reappearance of Thrawn, this means Disney is protecting its assets by bringing Thrawn under copyright control via *Rebels* and manages him so as not to dilute the Star Wars brand or risk alienating the target audience. The realignment of the Star Wars canon after 2014 signals Disney's intention to assert their rights as franchise owner and protect the brand from alternative versions—such as the EU—as depicted in the novels, comics, video games, animated series, and roleplaying games since 1977. Thrawn's journey from EU to *Rebels* shows us how Disney can profit from new character developments while also tying in older stories. Franchises exploit these strategies in service of consolidation and conglomeration by bringing the property under tighter control to prevent the brand from fading or its message from becoming confused. This affords the promise of synergy, where the same content can dominate across markets and generate more income.

20 Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 2.

21 Jennifer Holt, *Empires of Entertainment: Media Industries and the Politics of Deregulation, 1980-1996* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2011), 3.



Synergy, as Kristin Thompson describes it, is about “selling the same narrative over and over in different media.”<sup>22</sup> For Disney, this means continuing to produce new films and supporting television series, but also promoting Star Wars on its many television channels, in its theme parks, and through its chain of street-level stores. However, according to Derek Johnson, such product diversification reduces the franchise to a selling machine, where business structures are purely about the marketing of the same product regardless of form and content. Star Wars is often described as mythic and therefore timeless and unchanging, but the story in its various incarnations and media-specific formats requires careful consideration and development, as partnerships are constantly negotiated between copyright owner and the creative industries. This is particularly important since many parts of the transmedia franchise are marketed at specific audiences.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, as a transmedia narrative, Star Wars requires Disney to look outside of its own corporate structures to enlist creative talent like Filoni, who started out with Lucasfilm on *The Clone Wars*, and Zahn, who has been central to the historical success of the EU storyworld, to drive and extend the property beyond Disney’s established network reach.

## Conclusion: Creating a Transmedia History

Many other Star Wars characters move across texts and media in similar ways to the three analyzed above. Indeed, the stories I highlighted by no means exhaust Star Wars’s transmedia storyworld. Ahsoka Tano and Saw Gerrera, for example, who both originated in *The Clone Wars* series, have become integral characters in the expanding fight against the Empire and are increasingly popular with fans. Tano was introduced as Anakin Skywalker’s padawan in the 2008 *Clone Wars* film, designed to help illustrate his own development from brash apprentice to wise master. Over the course of the subsequent series, her character evolved too, becoming an integral part of the Star Wars mythos. Her return from exile in season one of *Rebels* represented not only a shift across animated series, but also the fulfillment of fan desire to see her face her fallen Jedi Master in his guise as Darth Vader. Rumored plans to cast a live-action movie exploring Tano’s life

22 Kristin Thompson, *Storytelling in Film and Television* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 82.

23 For example, *Rebels* is aimed at the tween demographic of Disney’s XD cable channel.



underline Filoni's own view that she can exist "in all forms of media."<sup>24</sup> Saw Gerrera made the jump from animation to live action in *Rogue One*, where he was played by Forest Whitaker, after having first appeared in the fifth season of *The Clone Wars*. In *Rogue One*, he is a much older man, leader of a group of extremist freedom fighters, but his *Clone Wars* narrative helps to construct audience understandings of his character as new facts are revealed. The film's depiction of Gerrera provides further context for his eventual appearance in season three of *Rebels*, now more in the mold of Whitaker's filmic portrayal. Tano and Gerrera are therefore by no means limited by their animated origins, further reinforcing the notion that Star Wars's narrative history spreads across various and all forms of transmedia platforms. Furthermore, both *The Clone Wars* and *Rebels* have become important texts in themselves, creating new characters and stories that inform our understanding of Star Wars history.

What the characters discussed in this chapter demonstrate particularly well is Star Wars's "media mix"—texts and paratexts, animation and films, history and narrative merging together across multiple continuities. While Boba Fett was clearly the first character to inspire elaborate transmedia crossovers in Star Wars, he has certainly not been the last; Darth Maul and Grand Admiral Thrawn have been incrementally built and rebuilt using earlier and alternate manifestations of their characters. But the old does not simply pave the way for the new: watching and rewatching, reading and rereading newer textual iterations informs and opens up our understanding and enjoyment of older tales. These characters have been transformed and reimagined to serve the transmedia storyworld as the multimedia franchise has grown and expanded. Crossover characters act as catalysts for new stories and new marketing opportunities, while also functioning as familiar narrative signposts directing fans to important moments and events within the transmedia universe of Star Wars.

24 Qtd. in "Ahsoka's Untold Tales Panel | Star Wars Celebration Europe 2016," YouTube video, 1:02:22, posted by "Star Wars," July 15, 2016, accessed May 15, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IS4scIln5J4>.

## 8. The Digitizing Force of Decipher's *Star Wars Customizable Card Game*

*Jonathan Rey Lee*

What kind of thread can hold together several millennia of galactic history? In Star Wars, the only thread expansive enough is the Force, which unifies the numerous depicted characters, governments, and worlds into a single history, a galactic saga of lightsabers and levitation. But is this thread strong enough also to hold together a transmedia universe spanning hundreds of texts in different media? It certainly does its best to promote continuity by tying together even overtly contradictory stories—for instance, allowing *The Force Awakens* to reboot the Star Wars EU while remaining distinctively and canonically Star Wars. Yet, even the fabric of a fictional universe can promote such continuity only by the grace of its fans, who ultimately determine to what extent a transmedia story is perceived as a whole. The wisdom of the Jedi suggests that “many of the truths we cling to depend greatly on our own point of view” (*Return of the Jedi*) and that “your focus determines your reality” (*The Phantom Menace*). Similarly, one might say that storyworlds depend greatly on how they are mediated; in other words, mediation determines fictional realities. While this is characteristic of transmedia storytelling more generally, this chapter focuses on a single case: how the digital game mechanics of Decipher's *Star Wars Customizable Card Game* (hereafter the *SWCCG*) struggle to adapt four notions of the Force. In focusing on this popular yet doubly marginalized medium—CCGs are typically overlooked within both Star Wars canon formation<sup>1</sup> and transmedia storytelling scholarship—this chapter also sheds some light on how medium-specific tensions introduce continuity and discontinuity in transmedia storytelling.

<sup>1</sup> Games have an especially ambiguous place within the hierarchical Star Wars canon, partially because they do not relate a consistent storyline and partially because game mechanics are not considered ‘story,’ as described anecdotally on *Wookieepedia*. See “Canon,” *Wookieepedia*, accessed March 28, 2017, <http://starwars.wikia.com/wiki/Canon>.

## CCGs as Digital Media

Although CCGs are not generally considered digital media, their medium-specific contribution to transmedia storytelling is fundamentally digital. This disjunction is due to the relatively recent colloquial definition of “digital” as “computational,” which associates digitality exclusively with computer technology rather than the broader conceptual paradigms—such as counting—that give digitality its name. Thus, many contemporary theorists attempt to move beyond the technological definition<sup>2</sup> and show how digitality underlies aspects of modern culture as varied as the functioning of control societies<sup>3</sup> and the nature of philosophical thought.<sup>4</sup> In this broader sense, drawing upon the etymology of “digital” as pertaining to digits, one can consider a medium to be digital insofar as it represents via sets of discrete, countable symbols.<sup>5</sup> While understanding digitality in this way may not lead to clean definitional divisions, it does shed light on how media function as interpretive paradigms that alternately represent the world as assemblage or flow, particle or wave.

Digitality, then, is a lens for perceiving and representing the world discontinuously, quantitatively, combinatorically. While not all games are digital in this way, games tend towards digitality because many common game mechanics are systematically organized as discrete or countable. Discreteness is found, for example, in the boundary lines in sports and board games and the sorting of game elements into hands, decks, and pools. Similarly, countability is found in all scoring systems and game economies and most randomization systems like cards and dice. And, above all, games deploy the above to perpetuate the binarization inherent in assigning winners and losers.<sup>6</sup> Given that “Collectible card games are at their root combinatorial

2 Ted Friedman, *Electric Dreams: Computers in American Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2005); Benjamin Peters, “Digital,” in *Digital Keywords: A Vocabulary of Information Society and Culture*, ed. Benjamin Peters (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 93–108.

3 Seb Franklin, *Control: Digitality as Cultural Logic* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2015).

4 Alexander R. Galloway, *Laruelle: Against the Digital* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

5 According to Florian Cramer, “‘Digital’ simply means that something is divided into discrete, countable units—countable using whatever system one chooses, whether zeroes and ones, decimal numbers, tally marks on a scrap of paper or the fingers (digits) of one’s hand—which is where the word ‘digital’ comes from in the first place.” See Florian Cramer, “What is ‘Post-Digital’?,” in *New Media, Old Media: A History and Theory Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Wendy Hui Kyong Chun and Anna Watkins Fisher (New York: Routledge, 2016), 694.

6 This is true even of cooperative and single-player games, the only difference being that in such games all players either win or lose together.

exercises,”<sup>7</sup> CCGs abound in these kinds of digital elements, carving up the play surface into discrete areas, employing game economies that structure the circulation of discrete cards, and using numerical stats to arithmetically determine game actions. More fundamentally, CCGs are defined by two deeply digital logics which alternately give the CCG its name: collection and customization.

Reading a CCG as a *collectible* card game places the emphasis on the CCG as a branded media object defined by its unique method of distribution of being sold in randomized packs. This is no small issue when one considers that the most basic unit of media production or analysis is the *text*—both the material object that is designed, marketed, and sold as well as the immaterial object that is received, engaged, and loved. Yet, the collectability of the CCG is completely anathema to the idea that a singular object could be the repository for something like a story. Instead, the CCG restructures its textuality within a digital logic. Cards are not primarily conceived in isolation, but rather in relationships with other cards in a particular set—the randomized *pack* that constitutes the most basic CCG commodity, the collection that functions as an expandable fan archive, or the deck that is used in gameplay.

This set logic reconstrues rather than replaces textual logic by encouraging combinatoric readings of the textual elements on different cards in the set. The design of the SWCCG cards includes visual and verbal signifiers that have strong dialogic relationships both with other cards and with the broader transmedia universe. The most prominent such signifier is a screenshot that occupies the central space on each card. Arresting the flow of time by turning a single frame into a collectible still, the card highlights visual details of the film. Above this central image is the card's title and “flavor text,” both of which connect the image to the broader narrative. These verbal descriptions generally situate the card within the storyworld (such as by indicating relevant characteristics or relationships) or fill in details of the storyworld (such as by naming unnamed characters or describing untold backstories). The card thus has value not only within a trading card economy, but also within a knowledge economy, providing cultural capital to fan communities. These encyclopedic<sup>8</sup> visual and verbal signifiers

7 Eric Lang, “Design Decisions and Concepts in Licensed Collectible Card Games,” *Electronic Book Review*, January 27, 2008, accessed May 15, 2017, <http://electronicbookreview.com/thread/firstperson/adaptable>.

8 Whereas narratives like Timothy Zahn's *Thrawn Trilogy* (probably the key EU text) expand Star Wars primarily by continuing the story, the SWCCG does so by filling in the universe's details. It finds an unusual kinship, therefore, in various illustrated guides, encyclopedias,

combine to produce a digital archive of images and facts that break up the transmedia storyworld into bits of information meant to be individually assimilated and collectively reassembled.

To collect, then, is to assemble an archive at once digital and material. Reading a CCG as a *customizable* card game, by contrast, emphasizes the transition from set collection to set creation as players assemble cards from their collection into 60-card *decks* that are used to play the game. Deck-building, therefore, is a metagame: a form of curation that intertwines affective and strategic considerations. From a strategic perspective, deck-building consists in authoring the possibility space of the gameplay by selecting the cards that will be available during the game. From a thematic perspective, deck-building is an experiment in counterfactual world-building that determines what elements of the world—and, thereby, what version of the Star Wars EU—will come into play. While individual players may care more about one perspective than the other, gameplay and theme are integrated into cards that function simultaneously as game items and as fan collectibles. Relying on both aspects, the process of deck-building is essentially staging, establishing props for emergent narrative gameplay; this staging is fundamentally digital in that the stage is constituted by a curated set of discrete cards.

Following the dual curations of collection and customization, these decks are put into play through a kind of strategic assemblage in which players make decisions about which cards and combinations of cards to use within the game. Consequently, each playthrough produces a unique counterfactual unfolding of how the core struggle of Star Wars might play out. While this is not storytelling exactly, the narratives that emerge from these assemblages can be considered a kind of emergent fan fiction—a strangely collaborative form of story-making driven by a contested interplay of cards and game actions. To play a transmedia CCG is therefore paradoxically akin both to authoring a fan response to the source text and performing a goal-directed simulation of the source text's world. Acting upon the stage set by the digital deck-building, CCG gameplay constitutes a kind of improvised dialogue in which the discrete signifiers of the cards are circulated through a storyworld that is at once extrapolated from the

several short story anthologies (such as *Tales from Mos Eisley Cantina*, *Tales from Jabba's Palace*, and *Tales of the Bounty Hunters*) that provide narratives for background characters who became iconic despite playing minor roles in the films.

cards and referenced by the cards.<sup>9</sup> In other words, this collision of decks neither retells nor eschews the Star Wars universe—instead, it collects and customizes that universe in a playful reassembly of digital elements.

## Digitizing the Force

While all CCGs share this intersection of digital collection and customization, unique card designs and rule structures sharply differentiate CCGs to the point where it might be plausible to claim that individual CCGs are distinct media. Consequently, different CCGs generate different storyworlds—not just in their thematic content, but also at the fundamental metaphysical level of determining what kinds of things can exist, what kind of actions can take place, and what kind of relationships can emerge within that universe. Thus, this section takes a closer look at the specific design of the SWCCG and how it digitizes four aspects of the Force that organize the storyworld.

The SWCCG was released two years after *Magic: The Gathering* inaugurated the CCG as a game genre with its wildly popular 1993 release. At times second only to *Magic* in popularity,<sup>10</sup> the SWCCG included eleven expansions that mostly followed the events of the original trilogy films, only briefly venturing into *The Phantom Menace*<sup>11</sup> before being discontinued in 2001. The game, therefore, is situated solidly within the EU era and maintains many intertextual connections with the novels and other transmedia texts of the period. The game itself refracts the material storyworld of Star Wars into several card classes: Characters, Locations, and four types of objects: Starships, Vehicles, Devices, and Weapons.<sup>12</sup> These are relatively

9 For further details on how CCGs play out fan response through a “haptic-panoptic” interface, see Kurt Lancaster, *Interacting with Babylon 5: Fan Performances in a Media Universe* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2001).

10 According to the SWCCG Players Committee.

11 I will not refer specifically to *The Phantom Menace* cards, but it should be noted that those cards perpetuated a persistent anachronism that both problematizes and extends the adaptive potential of the game. By mixing two distinct eras in the pool of available cards, the game became a much more fantastic representation of the Star Wars universe, moving from the logic of the alternate reality narrative—which allows fan/players to reconfigure elements of the narrative universe in ways that are not canonical but are at least plausible—to the logic of the action figure, in which the representation of decontextualized characters encourages mash-ups based on physical simultaneity that can transcend narrative time and even media license.

12 Other card types, like Objectives, emerged later in the game's development and are not discussed here.

straightforward adaptations: Characters move between and battle over Locations using various objects that enhance their capacity to do so. Materially distinct entities are easily represented as distinct cards—the digital logics commonly used to differentiate people, places, and things are adapted intuitively. The adaptation of events, actions, and utterances from the films is more complex, unhinging elements of the source plot from their contextual and temporal frames. Interrupts, which allow players to interject some immediate change into the gameplay, reflect the surprises, decisions, causes, and consequences that make up the film plot. Similarly, Effects represent ongoing conditions that take place in the storyworld and modify basic game mechanics. Interrupts and Effects have a peculiarly linguistic bent, with many of the card names drawing on quotations from the films. In so doing, these cards transform a variety of utterances (many of them descriptive) into performative utterances that enact change in the storyworld as they are played. Darth Vader's implied order "I want that ship" in *The Empire Strikes Back*, for example, becomes an Effect that can be played on an opponent's starship to make it easier and more beneficial to capture, altering the digital values of cards in the game world to better reflect the thematic weight of the storyworld wherein certain ships are more valuable to the plot. This is indicative of how the SWCCG routinely generalizes specific events, actions, and utterances, transforming the happenings that constitute the filmic experience into the general potential for certain kinds of actions.

As the material storyworld and the transmedia story are translated into these card types, they are digitized in the process. A character with dynamic skills becomes a Character card with rigid statistics. A location with substantive terrain becomes an abstract conceptual frame signifying the (binary) presence or absence of any number of characters. An event with contextual significance becomes a quantifiable game action. This digitization presents a peculiar problem for transmedia storytelling in general and for adapting the Force in particular. While themes of digitality run throughout the Star Wars storyworld,<sup>13</sup> the prevailing logic of the Force is hyper-continuous. In most canonical texts, the Force is presented as supernatural, mystical, and holistic. Even though the pseudoscientific explanation of the Force as due to quantifiable midi-chlorians suggests that the Force has a digital component, the Jedi in the prequel trilogy still maintain a quasi-religious iconography

13 Digitality can be found in the binary logic of the battle of good and evil, in the themes of technology and data collection that run throughout the series, in the biological quantification of Force ability as the presence of symbiotic midi-chlorians, etc.



and meditative practices that suggests a more mystical paradigm. In fact, the Force suspends, transcends, and sometimes transforms material reality, most commonly as something that transcends quantifiable physical laws. While this logic is not incompatible with CCG design, the tension between the digital structure of the CCG and its holistic subject matter certainly problematizes the continuity of transmedia storytelling. Thus, the following four case studies demonstrate not a wholesale rejection of holism in favor of digitality, but the medium-specific challenges of striving to represent holism through digital game mechanics.

### *The Force as Power*

There is no question that the powers of the Jedi have captured viewers' attentions over the decades. Indeed, Obi-Wan Kenobi opens his explanation of the Force by emphasizing that "The Force is what gives a Jedi his power" (*A New Hope*). Echoing this sentiment, Dan Rubey argues that thematically, "If *Star Wars* is 'about' anything, it is about power—and the source of ultimate power in the film is the Force."<sup>14</sup> The mystical nature of the Force, however, prevents its power from being simplistically reduced to everyday notions of power, such as physical power, technological power, or political power, which are all ways of mediating an individual's ability to act in and upon the world. Instead, the supernatural power of the Force problematizes the notion of power as an expression of agency. As Obi-Wan indicates in response to Luke's queries in *A New Hope*, the Force partially "controls your actions" and partially "obeys your commands." On the surface, games are not particularly amenable to adapting this kind of mystical synergy of spiritual forces. Thus, *Star Wars* games typically digitize Force powers as quantifiable game actions. While this instrumentalizes the Force by turning it into a tool for player agency, the complicated relationship between the player and the game system reflects how the Force simultaneously localizes and delocalizes agency.

The SWCCG implements Force powers through a multilayered process—firstly by quantifying the Force attunement of characters and secondly by having activated abilities that often target this stat. Ability quantifies

14 Dan Rubey, "Not So Long Ago nor Far Away: New Variations on Old Themes and Questioning *Star Wars*' Revival of Heroic Archetypes," in *Myth, Media, and Culture Star Wars: An Anthology*, ed. Douglas Brode and Leah Deyneka (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2012), 57.



Force attunement<sup>15</sup> as a passive stat, a numerical value from zero to seven assigned to all Characters.

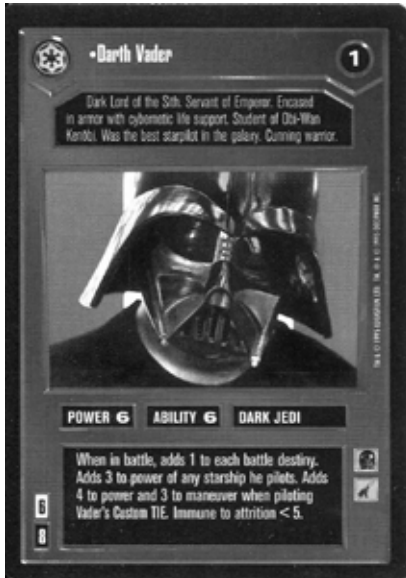


Fig. 8.1: Character card – Darth Vader



Fig. 8.2: Interrupt card – Move along

This digitization thus turns Force attunement into a numerical value that represents ability not as agential, but as a reservoir or a standing reserve. Like the midi-chlorians, this digitizes the power of the Force as a potential rather than kinetic energy—the precondition for action rather than action itself. The most direct adaptation of Force powers is therefore found not in the rule system, but in game actions provided by the text of various cards. A notable example is the Character card “Darth Vader, Dark Lord of the Sith” (Fig. 8.1), whose ability allows him to “choke” an opposing character. While examples like this are relatively rare, Force abilities are more commonly represented as Interrupts or Effects. For example, the “Move Along ...” Interrupt (Fig. 8.2) refers to a scene when Obi-Wan Kenobi uses the Force to pass unchallenged through a security checkpoint. As a single card tied to a single action, such

15 The ability numbers make sense in the case of the Jedi, with Yoda and the Emperor receiving the highest scores and Luke slowly gaining in ability as he becomes a Jedi himself. Yet, for the other characters, who do not exhibit any Force-sensitivity whatsoever, the values seem rather arbitrary or, rather, tied to other non-Force measures of ability (e.g. Han has an Ability of 3 whereas a generic Rebel Trooper has an Ability of 1).

Interrupts more clearly reflect Force abilities as interventions into the natural order wielded by active agents (characters and players). These representations, however, completely decontextualize the represented abilities from the scenes that feature them. "Move Along...", for instance, allows a player to move opposing Characters away from an ongoing battle. This simultaneously digitizes and instrumentalizes the Force by turning a scene that initially had significance within its filmic context into a discrete, isolated ability.

At the same time, this ability is designed to be redeployed in the strategic assemblage of gameplay through a multilayered representation of agency that is akin to the filmic representation of the Force. First, while these abilities are isolated from their narrative context, they are not fundamentally insular. Force powers are enacted through the intersection of the player, the card, and the game system itself, suggesting a distributed agency that partially reflects the mystical universalism of the Force. Second, the game as a whole blends strategy and chance in ways that reflect how games simultaneously play out fantasies of control and fatalism.<sup>16</sup> In the end, Force powers are abstracted away from their narrative context only to be re-embedded in a gameplay context.

### *The Force as Morality*

Drawing as much upon cowboy movies and the chivalric and samurai codes as science fiction, Star Wars depicts a famously binary moral universe. The age-old narrative trope of good versus evil is woven into the fabric of the universe itself as the tangible presence of the Force lends concreteness to the moral categories of Light and Dark. Yet, the intrinsically moral nature of this binarism becomes complicated when adapted into competitive gameplay, which presumes a kind of amoral antagonism. In this context, a tension emerges between the imperatives for games to offer equal subject positions and for adaptations to reflect hierarchies between subject positions present in the source text. As a game adaptation and a participatory fan production, the SWCCG reconciles this contradiction between narrative and gameplay to create a play experience that is paradoxically both morally binarized and amoral. Using the uniquely two-layered play experience of the CCG, it maintains this paradox primarily by framing an amoral strategy play within an aesthetically binarized deck-building play.

<sup>16</sup> See the discussions of *agon* and *alea* in Roger Caillois, *Man, Play, and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (New York: The Free Press of Glencoe, 1961).

To bridge the gap between the moral binary of Star Wars and the presumed amorality of competitive gameplay, Decipher chose a radical design option: a thoroughly asymmetrical game in which the Light Side and Dark Side play with decks constructed from completely independent pools of cards. In addition to complicating competitive balance, there are several thematic consequences to maintaining an absolute distinction between the Light and Dark Sides. As moral allegiance is built into the card itself, goodness becomes less a behavioral notion than a reflection of inherent character—what makes Luke “good” and Vader “bad” in the game is nothing more than that they are Light and Dark side cards respectively. While this certainly differs from the moral implications of the films, this difference may be less stark than it initially appears given that the films tend to aestheticize morality in similar ways. Thus, Rubey argues that “All we really have are two similar groups competing for power and dichotomized into ‘good’ and ‘evil.’ There is no complex understanding of what either good or evil could really mean.”<sup>17</sup> While there are certainly moral distinctions to be found in the Star Wars films, it is also the case that the films consistently differentiate Light and Dark aesthetically. Similarly, the dual design of the cards—which have different design templates for Light and Dark—becomes a frame that indelibly inks morality into the physical manifestation of characters and other card categories within the game world.

Through this aestheticization of morality, the SWCCG builds the morally binarized universe of Star Wars into the competitively binarized and physically divided universe of the game itself without implying any moral differentiation between the players. Translating this non-hierarchical aesthetic into gameplay, both sides share fundamental rules of engagement such that the simple separation of the cards into Light and Dark bears most of the thematic burden of reflecting the moral binary of Star Wars, allowing the play itself to take on a somewhat amoral (or at least reciprocal) character. Consequently, the SWCCG transforms the films’ strict separation of Light and Dark from a moral distinction into a perpetual opposition more like that between yin and yang in Taoist philosophy. Ironically, however, this amoral presentation distances players from participating in the moral binarization of the films while at the same time rendering that very binarization more absolute. The digital logic of the binary, that is, becomes starker when the distinction is linked with aesthetic design rather than moral behavior. In

17 Dan Rubey, “Not So Long Ago nor Far Away: New Variations on Old Themes and Questioning Star Wars’ Revival of Heroic Archetypes,” in *Myth, Media, and Culture in Star Wars: An Anthology*, ed. Douglas Brode and Leah Deyneka (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2012), 59.

other words, the SWCCG replaces a narrative logic of good and evil with a gameplay logic in which all actions merely reflect self-interested strategic maneuvers within a competitive arena.

### *The Force as Destiny*

By deemphasizing the morality of the Light and Dark binary in Star Wars, the SWCCG also transforms a third notion of the Force—the Force as destiny—from fatalistic<sup>18</sup> to probabilistic, sacrifices some of its holism in favor of a more digital logic. Although film audiences often leave satisfied when the narrative tension resolves into the expected outcome of good triumphing over evil, no competitive game has a built-in, completely inevitable outcome. To be inevitable, in many ways, is to not be a game.<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, the SWCCG does not abandon the concept of destiny, but reconfigures it from a fatalistic notion to a probabilistic one by using the cards as a semi-random element for determining the outcome of certain actions.

Just as the Force as morality weaves the thematic opposition of good and evil into the fabric of the fictional universe itself, the Force as destiny also weaves an inherent optimism into the outcome of this struggle. Thus, while the Emperor and Darth Vader are both depicted as wielding greater power than Luke, neither of them benefit from the kind of serendipity that Luke does. It is implied that the Force itself, sometimes anthropomorphized through the specters of Luke's former masters, guides Luke toward victory. This theme also runs throughout EU texts: in the Thrawn Trilogy, for example, the Empire looks to be on the path to victory behind the superior strategic genius of its new commander, but the New Republic manages to defeat him, because goodness itself tips the scales in its own favor.

Adapting this notion of destiny in a game form that cannot tolerate such inevitability requires privileging the dramatic tension in the narrative over

18 For a more detailed account of whether the future is fixed in Star Wars, see Jason T. Eberl, "‘You Cannot Escape Your Destiny’ (Or Can You?): Freedom and Predestination in the Skywalker Family," in *Star Wars and Philosophy: More Powerful Than You Can Possibly Imagine*, ed. Kevin S. Decker and Jason T. Eberl (Chicago: Open Court, 2005).

19 This is complicated in various ways. For example, some video games do have a completely determined sequence of events, but generally balance this by the tension of whether a player will succeed or fail to unravel this sequence. Similarly, most highly skill-dependent games will have inevitable outcomes in situations in which one player is much more skilled, but this inevitability is itself probabilistic—there is always some slight chance of an upset.

its inevitable resolution, which means, paradoxically, depicting destiny in a fundamentally self-contradictory way—as random rather than actually predestined. In the *SWCCG*, Destiny is the only attribute that is shared by every card of every type. Destiny is a numerical value, generally between zero and six, that is used instead of rolling a die to determine a random outcome. Unlike the total randomization of a die roll or coin toss, this probabilistic mechanic synthesizes both luck and skill by allowing the “random” draw to be influenced by both deck-building (which changes the probability distribution) and card counting. Thus, although this adaptation of the Force as destiny eliminates the agency of the universe, it builds in a degree of player agency that prevents the world from becoming a truly random space. Players themselves embody divergent destinies that create uncertainty by virtue of being opposed to one another, suggesting that digitality and holism may not be as exclusive as they may seem. It is possible to say, therefore, that the game pits the cosmic struggle of Light and Dark not as random events, but as the uncertain clash of two destinies that attempt to bend events towards their own desired outcomes.

### *The Force as Life*

After presenting his instrumental explanation of the Force as “what gives a Jedi his power,” Obi-Wan Kenobi turns towards the metaphysical to explain that the Force is “an energy field created by all living things” (*A New Hope*). While this notion of the Force as life is perhaps the most holistic of the four notions explored in this chapter, it is ironically the one best represented in the digital logic of the *SWCCG*, demonstrating that, while holism and digitality create a constant tension for this game adaptation, they are by no means mutually exclusive. In fact, digitality is precisely what enables an organic flow of cards to reflect the ecological<sup>20</sup> and relational unifying field that is the Force.

In the *SWCCG*, the deck itself becomes a physical representation of the Force in what is perhaps the most elegant feature of the game’s design. The 60-card Light and Dark decks that oppose each other unify and collectively represent the life of one “side” of the Force—a player loses not when their

20 For a more detailed analysis of environmental ethics in Star Wars, see Elizabeth F. Cooke, “‘Be Mindful of the Living Force’: Environmental Ethics in *Star Wars*,” in *Star Wars and Philosophy: More Powerful Than You Can Possibly Imagine*, ed. Kevin S. Decker and Jason T. Eberl (Chicago: Open Court, 2005).

characters die, but when the deck is depleted. The metaphor of the deck as life is made explicit through rules for “losing life,” which require players to discard cards, and “gaining life,” which bring previously discarded cards back into the deck. This is further extended by rules for “Force Drains,” which state that when a player controls a location, the opposing player loses life equal to the number of their Force Icons—symbols that reflect the strength of the Light or Dark side of the Force—on that location. Thus, the game connects the physical universe of Locations to the metaphysical universe of the Force as life, using the circulation of cards to reflect the waxing and waning of power within the eternal struggle between Light and Dark.

This circulation of cards complicates the Force-as-life metaphor, creating a digital ecology in which individual cards perform different functions as they circulate. The Force Pile mediates the Force as power by quantifying the amount of Force available for use, allowing the player to spend Force (by moving a number of cards to the Used Pile) to deploy cards or perform certain game actions. And, in a strangely counterproductive act of incarnation, it is this Force Pile from which cards are drawn, leaving the holistic reservoir of the deck and becoming agents that draw upon this same Force pile to affect the represented gameworld. Similarly, the Reserve Deck mediates the use of Destiny, which is drawn from the Reserve Deck, checked, and placed in the Used Pile. Finally, this cycle is completed when the Used Pile is placed under the Reserve Deck each turn. As cards cycle and recycle through the deck, discrete cards become elements in an organic flow that parallels the holism of a life Force that is generated by and yet interconnects discrete living entities.

## Conclusion

The *SWCCG* game adaptation, as with any ludic remediation, is designed to synthesize a narrative play experience from narrative and play conventions that are often in tension. As the *SWCCG* engages the tension between the holism of the Force and the digitality of the CCG, it does manage to adapt the aforementioned aspects—power, morality, destiny, and life—as implementable relations between digital cards. In so doing, the game digitizes the narrative.

However, for all the ways in which this game adaptation disrupts the underlying narrative structure of the films and other EU texts, the *SWCCG* is not really a subversive text. Instead, the game diverges from the narrative

in order to adapt the underlying fabric of the universe itself—the physical laws and narrative conventions that make Star Wars distinctive. The consequence of this imperfect translation is that the game offers a unique angle on the Star Wars universe, one particularly suited to providing fans with resources for constructing their own version of Star Wars from its deconstructed elements. In this adaptive paradigm, the idea of Star Wars as a fixed canon gives way to the idea of Star Wars as an imaginative storyworld that invites fan engagement. The digitality of the game medium, moreover, scaffolds such engagement by providing both an immersive structure (the rules) and narrative elements (the cards) for assembling emergent narrative play. This digital game, therefore, blends media reception and production into a ludic experience that plays out rather than retells Star Wars.

## 9. Publishing the New Jedi Order

### Media Industries Collaboration and the Franchise Novel

Sean Guynes

In April 2014, two years after Disney's purchase of Lucasfilm and its constellation of intellectual properties (IP) in October 2012, Lucasfilm/Disney announced plans to create the Lucasfilm Story Group that would establish a single canon for the franchise and coordinate world-building efforts across all forthcoming narrative media. Establishing a "true canon—a single, cohesive *Star Wars* storyline" meant jettisoning the EU of comics, video games, television shows, made-for-TV movies, and novels created since 1977. As the report of the Story Group's new canon project attested, the EU was largely conceived of as those adventures in the *Star Wars* storyworld taking place "beyond what is seen on the screen."<sup>1</sup> To save those off-screen stories, the EU was recycled in the new Legends publishing line to encourage continued revenue from no-longer-canonical sources. The header image of the announcement tellingly displayed the new Legends cover for Timothy Zahn's *Heir to the Empire* (1991), the first of the Thrawn Trilogy that formed the cornerstone of the EU's popularity with hardcore fans at a time when *Star Wars* was thought to be a franchise beyond licensing revivification.

In terms of sheer quantity, most of *Star Wars* has taken place on the printed page—in well over a thousand comics and novels. Yet, what scholarship exists on *Star Wars* continues to circle around film, television, and video games, while printed media, especially novels, are often worth little more than passing mention.<sup>2</sup> Even Chris Taylor's massive *How Star Wars*

1 "The Legendary *Star Wars* Expanded Universe Turns a New Page," *StarWars.com*, April 25, 2014, accessed March 1, 2017, <http://www.starwars.com/news/the-legendary-star-wars-expanded-universe-turns-a-new-page>.

2 Recent analyses giving any significant attention to novels include: Crystal Renee White, "How Media Created by *Star Wars* Defines the Franchise," in *Myth, Media, and Culture in Star Wars: An Anthology*, edited by Douglas Brode and Leah Deyneka (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2012), 101-112; the third chapter of Carolyn Cocca, *Superwomen: Gender, Power, and Representation* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016); and the sixth chapter of Colin Harvey, *Fantastic Transmedia: Narrative, Play, and Memory across Science Fiction and Fantasy Storyworlds* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).



*Conquered the Universe* treats such fictions anecdotally.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, despite the crossing of media boundaries implied by the term “transmedia,” its scholars seldom attend to printed media beyond comics, which were central to providing the IP licenses that led to the development of multibillion-dollar film franchises. This lack of attention to other printed media does make some historiographical sense, since the study of transmedia emerged from Henry Jenkins’s notion of convergence culture, the term he gave to practices of twenty-first-century “new media” defined as “the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want.”<sup>4</sup>

Focused as Jenkins was on the productive and participatory uses of media by its consumers and on the responses to those uses by media industries, Jenkins’s influence led a generation of scholars to look at particular types of media, sidelining, for the most part, the publishing industry and prose fiction. Novels became a part of transmedia and media studies primarily in the dressing of adaptation theory, which focused heavily on novel-to-film adaptations.<sup>5</sup> But with the exception of the film novelizations, Star Wars novels are not adaptations in Linda Hutcheon’s strictest sense;<sup>6</sup> they are not transpositions of existing storylines from one medium to another so much as they are storyworld expansions that make up a part of what Matt Hills calls the “endlessly deferred hyperdiegesis” that constitutes a given transmedia fiction’s expansive storyworld.<sup>7</sup> In this way, a Star Wars novel hardly differs from other transmedia fictions, like video games or comics.

But novels are fundamentally different from other media within the Star Wars franchise. Not only have they been treated as such within transmedia studies, but they also offer different modes of narration, have been historically significant to fan engagement with franchises, and are doubly ghettoized in the literary market for their dual position as genre fiction

3 Chris Taylor, *How Star Wars Conquered the Universe: The Past, Present, and Future of a Multibillion Dollar Franchise* (New York: Basic Books, 2015). Taylor devotes the nine-page chapter nineteen, “The Universe Expands” (286–295), to the entirety of Star Wars franchise novels.

4 Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 2.

5 The section on novelization in Thomas Van Parys and I.Q. Hunter, eds., *Science Fiction across Media: Adaptation/Novelization* (Canterbury: Gylphi, 2013) is an important exception and includes chapters by well-known novelization writers.

6 Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation* (Routledge, 2006).

7 Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 142.

and franchise production. I argue, therefore, in this chapter that *franchise novels*<sup>8</sup> provide unique insight into the relations of industrial collaboration that constitute media franchises by highlighting the often lucrative licensing partnerships between publishing companies and the audiovisual media industries. By focusing on franchise novels, I emphasize the key role they have played in the transmedia history of Star Wars. Following a survey of Star Wars franchise novels through the late 1990s that contextualizes their position within the larger field of Star Wars world-building, this chapter turns to a specific instance: the nineteen-book New Jedi Order series (1999–2003; hereafter NJO), an unprecedented publishing project to create a multi-authored mega-series designed by the publishers and Lucasfilm representatives, with input by Lucas, and carried out by individual authors. I demonstrate how tactics of industrial collaboration have come to account for the current production of Star Wars “by committee” via the Lucasfilm Story Group. In attending to NJO as an example that situates the franchise novel as a practice of industrial collaboration and transmedia world-building, I claim that print media and the novel in particular are critical to transmedia studies and in particular to studying transmedia as a media franchising strategy.

## Publishing Star Wars, 1977–1999

Matthew Freeman’s notion of an early-twentieth-century model of “building” transmedia worlds<sup>9</sup> defined the growth of the Star Wars franchise in the late 1970s and 1980s. This world-building strategy contrasts with the more recent, convergent model of transmedia storytelling that utilizes established interconnections among media industries and within media conglomerates to forge synergized storyworlds that flow across multiple media platforms.<sup>10</sup> Star Wars developed not as a set of predetermined, interrelated convergent narratives, but as a hodgepodge storyworld built up through a series of punctuated media extensions licensed by the newly created Lucasfilm company. These extensions, which famously included

8 What I call the franchise novel is commonly referred to as the *media tie-in novel*. But the term “tie-in” suggests a secondary, anecdotal relationship subordinating such novels to the “main” or “source” medium of storytelling. For many fans, however, these novels are vital to the experience of a transmedia franchise’s storyworld.

9 Matthew Freeman, *Historicising Transmedia Storytelling: Early Twentieth-Century Transmedia Story Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

10 Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 282.

toys, television shows, made-for-TV movies, and video games, began in the world of print media, with the novelization of *A New Hope* appearing in December 1976 and Marvel's release of a six-issue comics adaptation of the film timed so that the first three issues were available before its opening. Star Wars thus began for some fans in print before continuing into licensed comics and novels.

Lucasfilm capitalized successfully on the rich possibilities of a 1970s media ecology that was disposed to storyworld extensions through original novels, as franchises had been doing for decades. It makes sense, therefore, that in addition to the first film's novelization and the quick commission of a quasi-novelization-become-standalone-novel (Alan Dean Foster's 1978 *Splinter of the Mind's Eye*<sup>11</sup>), the company also licensed major science-fiction publisher Del Rey to publish original novels. Under their short-lived license, Del Rey released six novels in two trilogies, one each for Han Solo (1979-1980) and Lando Calrissian (1983), targeted at the growing Star Wars fandom and tied to the release schedules of *The Empire Strikes Back* and *Return of the Jedi*. The two trilogies, written by the relatively unknown science-fiction authors Brian Daley and L. Neil Smith, were set in locations invented by the authors. They followed the title characters on adventures that placed them in conflict with local law enforcement, gangsters, and goons of corporate enterprises. Setting the novels outside of the storyworld-to-date and before the events in *A New Hope* ensured that the books did not conflict with Lucas's ongoing storytelling.

The Star Wars storyworld went into hibernation in the mid-1980s, shortly after *Return of the Jedi*.<sup>12</sup> As one potential licensee told Howard Roffman of Lucas Licensing in the 1980s, "*Star Wars* is dead."<sup>13</sup> Although it expanded into the realm of TRPGs in 1987 with West End Games's *Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game*, Star Wars was not revived until it returned to bookstores in 1991, when Zahn's *Heir to the Empire* presented fans with the story of what happened after *Return of the Jedi*. *Heir to the Empire* and the two novels that completed this new trilogy (1992, 1993) were authored with a greater level of oversight from Lucasfilm than were the Daley and Smith trilogies or Marvel's comics, the latter of which led to occasionally bonkers storylines. In exercising greater control over Zahn's novels, Lucasfilm hoped to establish

11 See Matthew Freeman's chapter in this volume on the media-historical context of what he calls Foster's quasi-novelization.

12 Two Ewok-centered made-for-TV movies (1984, 1985) failed to encourage further interest; in 1986, Marvel ceased publishing its Star Wars comics and the animated children's television series *Droids* and *Ewoks* were both cancelled.

13 Taylor, *How Star Wars Conquered the Universe*, 284.

a relatively consistent storyworld through the new novels and, as such, directed Zahn to draw on *Star Wars: The Roleplaying Game*'s encyclopedic rundown of the storyworld's elements, which included names, attributes, and histories of virtually all characters, species, and locations from the films. Zahn's success was a shock for Lucasfilm, but expected by Bantam's science-fiction imprint, Spectra. Founder and editor Lou Aronica had felt aggrieved by what he considered the "so-so" quality of monthly novels published by other media franchises.<sup>14</sup> But recruiting the Hugo award-winning author Zahn<sup>15</sup> and getting Lucas's go-ahead to tell stories set after the films did the trick: *Star Wars* became a major property for Bantam Spectra and thereby a coveted publishing license.

Aronica hoped to publish one bestselling hardcover per year. But the series's profitability and reader demand drove the number of yearly novels higher, even as critics and fans agreed that the books' quality deteriorated. By 1996, Bantam Spectra was publishing at least ten novels per year in addition to the numerous junior and YA novels licensed by other publishers specializing in children's literature. Bantam ended up publishing over 50 novels before Lucasfilm moved the license back to Del Rey in 1999 in anticipation of a renewed interest in the franchise that would follow the release of *The Phantom Menace*.<sup>16</sup> The return to Del Rey was also motivated by Lucasfilm's dissatisfaction with the rapid sprawling of the EU and the uneven quality of the novels; they wanted the EU instead "to slowly build up a vast and complex mythology."<sup>17</sup> To begin crafting this mythology, positioned as an extension of the Skywalker story, Lucasfilm, Del Rey, Dark Horse Comics (the comics IP licensee), and several authors therefore planned NJO as a publishing blockbuster equivalent to the filmic saga.

14 Taylor, *How Star Wars Conquered the Universe*, 288.

15 On the process of planning and writing Zahn's Thrawn Trilogy, and the negotiations between him and Lucasfilm over control of the storyline, see Taylor, *How Star Wars Conquered the Universe*, 290-293. On the process of writing *Star Wars* franchise novels under Bantam, see Roger MacBride Allen, "Media Tie-Ins: Why They Are Nearly Impossible for Beginners to Publish," *SFWA.org*, January 4, 2005, accessed March 1, 2017, <http://www.sfw.org/2005/01/media-tie-ins-why-they-are-nearly-impossible-for-beginners-to-publish/>.

16 Bantam was allowed to finish publishing books already contracted, so Bantam released three final novels in the *X-Wing* series, the final in a trilogy about bounty hunters, and the final in a series of short story anthologies in 1999.

17 Taylor, *How Star Wars Conquered the Universe*, 293.

## Industrial Collaboration and The New Jedi Order, 1999-2003

Franchise novels are products of industrial collaboration. Franchises, Derek Johnson argues, “do not replicate themselves” *ex nihilo* but, rather, “are produced in negotiated social and cultural contexts.”<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, “the replication of franchising extends not from the agency of corporate monoliths, but from producers working for and within industrial power structures.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, media franchises are constituted in industrial processes sustained by IP, licensing, and the profit from both. But they must also be understood as complex configurations of labor, legal, and socio-cultural forces produced through a network of collaborations that connects IP rights holders, licensees, creators who make products utilizing IP, and audiences. Audiences, in turn, consume and, through their consumption practices, respond in turn to the licensed product, franchise, and network that led to the product’s production and the franchise’s replication.

NJO offers a unique case study in the network of media franchising collaborations with the publishing industry since the series followed from an explicit attempt by the IP rights holder to redirect a franchise’s relationship with the publishing industry to better enact a particular transmedia world-building strategy. Moreover, NJO raises questions about the various levels of creative collaboration required to plan, write, and publish a nineteen-novel book series—from collaboration between the NJO planning committee entities and their various creative and industrial purchases on the project, to that between individual authors and editors as well as, ultimately, to economic and cultural stakeholders.

If NJO is remembered for anything, it is for the death of Chewbacca, a soul-crushing event for many Star Wars fans that took place in the initial novel of the series: *Vector Prime* by R.A. Salvatore, acclaimed author of *Dungeons & Dragons* franchise novels. Since the killing off of major characters had been a no-no for Star Wars novelists from the beginning, Chewbacca’s death signaled to readers that NJO meant to raise the stakes significantly by changing the Star Wars storyworld.<sup>20</sup> *Vector Prime* introduced a series of

18 Derek Johnson, *Media Franchising: Creative License and Collaboration in the Culture Industries* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 3.

19 Johnson, *Media Franchising*, 4.

20 Responding to criticisms of Chewbacca’s death, Salvatore explained, the planning committee “decided that we had to make the point clear that when [the main characters are] in a fight, you really should be on the edge of your seat. In any book, at any time, someone could go” (bracketed text in original). Helen Keier, “R.A. Salvatore,” part II, *TheForce.net*, December 1999, accessed March 1, 2017, [www.theforce.net/jediecouncil/interview/salvatore2.shtml](http://www.theforce.net/jediecouncil/interview/salvatore2.shtml).

minor plots subject to the galaxy's invasion by a heretofore unencountered extragalactic species, the Yuuzhan Vong. The Yuuzhan Vong were both fascinating and repulsive: a species beyond the Force, unable to be sensed by the Jedi; a society with bio-organic technologies that violently eschewed all mechanical ones, possessing organisms bred to be starships, weapons, armor, and more; and a culture dedicated to the eradication or enslavement of all others, hell-bent on domination, and devoted to bodily mutilation in order to gain social prestige. In short, NJO was less sanitized in its presentation of violence, blood/gore, death, and trauma than any prior storyworld text, and thereby introduced more adult themes into the Star Wars universe.

NJO takes place 25 years after *Return of the Jedi*, far enough into the "future" of the Star Wars universe that the series had all of the EU as retrospective, a vast repository of horizontal memory that NJO planners and authors plundered to great effect. NJO writers, for example, relied on a massive cast of characters found only in novels and comics, as well as using a superweapon (an EU plot favorite) from Roger MacBride Allen's Corellian Trilogy (1995), Centerpoint Station, which proved vital to the defense strategy of the Rebellion's intergalactic successor state, the New Republic. NJO also expanded the mythology of the Skywalker family from the original trilogy, the origin of which had begun to be told in *The Phantom Menace*, by making Han and Leia's children—twins Jacen and Jaina and younger brother Anakin, born and given backstory in numerous EU novels—central to the multi-book story. Moreover, the series was a logical extension of a major plot begun in Kevin J. Anderson's Jedi Academy Trilogy (1994) and continued in numerous novels throughout the 1990s to train a new generation of Jedi (including the Solo children) in fulfillment of *Return of the Jedi*'s titular promise to reestablish the Jedi Order. NJO thus validated Bantam Spectra and other publisher-licensees' Star Wars world-building while also rewarding long-term fan-readers with the horizontal extension of those earlier novels' storytelling. At the same time, NJO charted the storyworld's growth more closely in consultation with Lucasfilm as the transmedia franchise's key stakeholder.

What is clear from interviews and secondhand accounts of the planning and development of NJO is that Del Rey's editorial director, Shelley Shapiro, wanted to give Star Wars novels a new face. A few years after Aronica had set out to make Star Wars novels better than "so-so," Bantam's franchise novels were starting to look like "Star Trekish formula pabulum," as NJO co-planner Michael A. Stackpole put it.<sup>21</sup> The Bantam novels, in other words, jumped

21 Helen Keier, "Michael A. Stackpole," *TheForce.net*, November 1999, [www.theforce.net/jedicouncil/interview/stackpole2.shtml](http://www.theforce.net/jedicouncil/interview/stackpole2.shtml).

around the Star Wars timeline, occasionally contradicted themselves, and were plotted with little concern for consistent world-building. Through a series of meetings in 1998, Shapiro worked with Lucasfilm managing editor Sue Rostoni, who had been in charge of basic continuity since the 1970s; Lucy Wilson, Lucasfilm's director of publishing; representatives from Dark Horse Comics, including Star Wars comics editor Randy Stradley; a handful of authors, including Stackpole and James Luceno; and various editors at Del Rey,<sup>22</sup> to plot an outline of 29 novels to be released over five years—though this was later reduced to nineteen over four. In addition to being designed by a committee of industry higher-ups, franchise stakeholders, and authors who would be involved, the series' major plot details—e.g. who would die—were ultimately checked with Lucas.

As a complexly plotted series, NJO was both a significant collaboration between multiple creative laborers and franchise stakeholders operating at various levels within the media industries, but it was also a continuity and world-building strategy devised purposefully by Lucasfilm. Wilson, for example, had long lamented that Star Wars novels were too much the creation of authors telling stories based purely on their individual whims. In a round-robin interview, Wilson recalled that “[t]he Bantam books were very much determined by what each writer wanted to create and were either one-off titles or trilogy series. [...] But as the universe got more complicated, it was clear we had to take more control over where the stories were going in order to maintain this continuity.”<sup>23</sup> To reassert a semblance of control over franchise novel continuity, Lucasfilm included “a new spin-off fiction program that would be one big sequential story” in the contract it negotiated with Del Rey for the rights to produce prequel film novelizations and spin-off novels.<sup>24</sup> In other words, the idea for NJO was part of a strategic contract negotiation to effect a switch from one publishing licensee to another in an effort to produce a more unified, franchise-controlled linear expansion of the transmedia storyworld. More than an unprecedented publishing project, NJO was a franchising move that reestablished Lucasfilm's oversight of the Star Wars brand and was, no doubt, also an effort to increase revenue from its publishing licenses.

Lucasfilm and Del Rey treated their novels as a departure from Bantam's book series. This is especially evident in Del Rey's marketing and

22 For the most complete rundown of all involved, see “*Star Wars: The New Jedi Order Round-Robin Interview*,” *Unifying Force*, by James Luceno (Del Rey, 2003), appended interview, n.p.

23 “Round-Robin Interview,” n.p.

24 “Round-Robin Interview,” n.p.



merchandising tactics, its efforts at intramedial storytelling (through connections with non-NJO Star Wars novels published during the same period<sup>25</sup>), and their choice of authors. With the prequel trilogy sure to inspire a renewal of popular interest in Star Wars and a new generation of fan-consumers, Lucasfilm viewed a publishing license switch-up as a new start for Star Wars novels and readers, some of whom would be coming to the novels for the first time. NJO provided an important point of entry, then, since it neither inhibited prequel spin-off storytelling nor retreaded the shakily established EU continuity to date. Moreover, NJO's debut also followed two years after the original trilogy special editions were released in 1997, opening a new market for the films and tie-in merchandising, and introducing a younger generation—including many six-year-olds like me—to the first films. This context further layered the ways in which NJO was positioned to catch the attention of possible Star Wars audiences. In this way, NJO worked to rebrand the Star Wars franchise novel, as the examples of their strategy below demonstrate.

Del Rey rebranded, in part, through targeted marketing, a visual shift consistent across all book-cover art from painted to digitally produced,<sup>26</sup> and adapted merchandise, including a series of audiobook productions and a *Star Wars: Roleplaying Game* NJO sourcebook. One key marketing strategy was the production of a television commercial for *Vector Prime*. Until the 1990s, book commercials were prohibitively expensive for publishing companies, but they became more affordable with the advent of cheaper digital production tools that then prompted cable channels to begin offering “targeted, inexpensive advertising opportunities for publishers anxious to reach” new readers; by 1994, such commercials were commonplace, though still reserved for projected blockbuster novels.<sup>27</sup> Del Rey took advantage of this new advertising medium for books with a 30-second television spot that aired on the Sci-Fi Channel in the months leading up to *Vector Prime*'s November 1999 publication. The spot featured a montage of clips from the original trilogy, including digital shots introduced in the 1997 special

25 For example, Greg Bear's *Rogue Planet* (2000), which introduced a living planet key to defeating the Yuuzhan Vong.

26 The first three NJO books were covered with art by famous science-fiction artist John Harris, a break from the previous Star Wars novels signifying a mainstream significance of the series; every NJO and franchise-line cover was created digitally thereafter.

27 Doreen Carvajal, “Promoting Books via TV Commercials and Movie Trailers Has Become Affordable,” *The New York Times*, April 28, 1997, accessed March 1, 2017, [www.nytimes.com/1997/04/28/business/promoting-books-via-tv-commercials-and-movie-trailers-has-become-affordable.html](http://www.nytimes.com/1997/04/28/business/promoting-books-via-tv-commercials-and-movie-trailers-has-become-affordable.html).



edition, as Mark Hamill provided an ominous frame for NJO: "I have fought the worst of all wars and witnessed the redemption of evil. [...] Now, with my loved ones and my loyal allies, I face a new challenge unlike any before. And I'm not sure if this time we can win." The commercial concludes with a pull-back from a close-up of the cover to reveal Salvatore's novel, as a different voice-over actor announces "the first novel of the New Jedi Order."<sup>28</sup> Although Del Rey's commercial appeared on a genre-specific channel, it signaled a desire to grab new franchise readers by presenting NJO as a sequel to the original trilogy, burying the EU's complexities through a rapid temporal shift from the "then" of *Return of the Jedi* to the "Now" of NJO. The commercial also capitalized on visual references to the recently re-released original trilogy and the cultural capital tied to hearing Luke himself vet the novel as the continuation of his story—one with a mysterious enemy and an unsure, unpredictable outcome.

Del Rey's selection of authors for the series was equally important to NJO's rebranding of the Star Wars franchise novel. Inviting authors new to the EU (Elaine Cunningham, Troy Denning, Shane Dix, Greg Keyes, James Luceno, Salvatore, Matthew Stover, Sean Williams, Walter Jon Williams) to work alongside those who helped pioneer it (Aaron Allston, Michael A. Stackpole, Kathy Tyers) was a simultaneous appeal to longtime reader-fans and newcomers. Bantam's pool of Star Wars writers had grown stagnant, even if those regulars were producing novels that were well-liked by readers. Stackpole's involvement in particular gave NJO a certain amount of credibility for die-hard reader-fans. The presence of other Star Wars well-knowns, like the occasional X-Wing series writer Allston and Tyers, author of the early EU novel *The Truce at Bakura* (1993), ensured a sense of creative continuity between Bantam's punctuated expansion of the storyworld and Del Rey's more systematic approach. At the same time, the infusion of nine new authors into the Star Wars writers' fold added stylistic and tonal variety to the storyworld and had the added bonus of ensuring new readers would not be intimidated by too many authors with a long backlist of Star Wars titles. It also meant that the franchise could piggyback on the popularity of the new authors, all of whom were respected in various arenas of fantasy and science-fiction writing. NJO's selection of new and carryover authors thus positioned the series and its beginning of a new era in Star Wars publishing to take advantage of multiple potential reader audiences.

28 "The New Jedi Order *Vector Prime* Commercial," YouTube video, 0:29, posted by lugia6, May 30, 2010, accessed March 1, 2017, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P13oUIn4BtU>.

## New Jedi, New Order

NJO ended in November 2003 with Luceno's *The Unifying Force*. Like most of the novels in the series, it landed on *The New York Times*'s best sellers list, debuting at number ten before quickly dropping off.<sup>29</sup> Through its new partnership with Del Rey, Lucasfilm wielded greater editorial power in its relationship with the publishing industry, and the unprecedented NJO novel series constituted an attempt to create a more coherent transmedia storyworld for a new generation of fans. Of course, Del Rey's NJO-led rebranding of the Star Wars franchise novel and its attempt to develop a single continuous storyworld together with Lucasfilm was hardly any more successful than Bantam's. Since the late 1990s, there has never been a year in which fewer than ten Star Wars novels were published;<sup>30</sup> rather than reducing Bantam's sprawl of franchise novel extensions, Del Rey actually exacerbated it in response to a growing Star Wars fandom. In spite of the continuity "problems" posed by such a massive number of Star Wars novels, the EU created by the various transmedia licensees supplied one of the franchise's most valuable assets. As noted in Disney's 2012 press release statement of intended acquisition, the Star Wars "universe of more than 17,000 characters inhabiting several thousand planets spanning 20,000 years offers infinite inspiration and opportunities."<sup>31</sup> In other words, the franchise was a lucrative IP farm for Disney, nearly all of which had been supplied by transmedia extensions of the film franchise—especially the EU and its novels.

NJO ultimately marked a shift in the production of Star Wars franchise novels and the relationship between licensor and licensee. The series paved the way for the tightly knit inter-industrial relationships that define the current Lucasfilm Story Group's approach to planning and producing not only franchise novels but the entire transmedia storyworld. NJO's unique position in the history of the franchise novel therefore calls for a closer attention to print media. Such attention is especially significant for studying a storyworld like post-Disney Star Wars, since the now equally canonical status of all narrative media, the plunderability of old EU IP to craft new tales, and the Story Group's attempts to produce a single, unified storyworld

29 "Best Sellers: November 30, 2003," *The New York Times*, November 30, 2003, accessed March 1, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/30/books/best-sellers-november-30-2003.html>.

30 Taylor, *How Star Wars Conquered the Universe*, 290.

31 "Disney to Acquire Lucasfilm, Ltd," *The Walt Disney Company*, October 30, 2012, accessed March 1, 2016, <http://thewaltdisneycompany.com/disney-to-acquire-lucasfilm-ltd/>.

across a quickly rising number of media texts is unheard of. A grounding in the novels and in other licensed print media, for example comics, will help us better understand transmedia world-building by reconceptualizing the primacy of media types in our analyses of the interconnections among franchising and transmedia world-building strategies. That is, where the pre-Disney Star Wars canon model saw the films as more important than other media permutations of the storyworld (liable to be wiped out of continuity should a new film or television show contradict it), Lucasfilm's approach to building the Star Wars transmedia world in the Disney era demands that we give equal weight to the novels. This change in the Star Wars world-building model requires a shift in perspective on the part of transmedia scholars in order to fully grasp how the franchise's storytelling is evolving under a new set of strategies and how the industrial processes of convergence, profit, creative license, and negotiated authorship are unfolding in this new design-by-committee era of Star Wars.

## 10. How Star Wars Became Museological

### Transmedia Storytelling in the Exhibition Space

*Beatriz Bartolomé Herrera and Philipp Dominik Keidl*

Star Wars's production and reception histories—not to mention the millennia-long history of the storyworld itself—have been documented across books, television specials, DVD extras, interviews, articles, wikis, and fan-run websites. Another important site to encounter the franchise's history is the museum. In fact, with the sale of Lucasfilm to Disney in 2012, George Lucas has turned his attention from filmmaking and producing to the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art, which is set to open in Los Angeles and will house his collection of paintings, illustrations, comics, props, films, and digital art.<sup>1</sup>

This museum project is not the first time that Lucas has appeared in the role of art collector, philanthropist, and museologist. Since the early 1990s, Lucasfilm has licensed and co-curated several themed exhibitions for museums, science centers, and other exposition venues, offering visitors detailed insights into the production process through the display of various objects from Lucas's cinematic oeuvre. Star Wars-themed exhibitions have been the most popular of Lucasfilm's exhibitions by far, bringing large numbers of visitors into many different institutions. For instance, throughout its fifteen-month run from October 1997 to January 1999, *The Magic of Myth* drew more than 900,000 visitors to the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum (NASM), becoming one of the most popular shows in the institution's history.<sup>2</sup> However, despite the franchise's growing museum presence, the study of exhibitions has only played a minor role in Star Wars scholarship. The few studies addressing exhibitions mostly discuss the complex and mixed perceptions of the franchise's cultural status and

<sup>1</sup> After the unsuccessful plans to build the museum in San Francisco and Chicago, Lucas announced in January 2017 that the project would be realized in Exposition Park in Los Angeles. At the time of writing, the museum has no official opening date.

<sup>2</sup> Kevin M. Williams, "Exploring the Myth that Is 'Star Wars,'" *Chicago Sun-Times*, July 14, 2000. *Star Wars the Magic of Myth* Press Clippings Chicago, Accession 07-135, Box 10, The Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington D.C.

its use as an educational tool within art, science, natural history, film, and technology museums.<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter, we redirect the debates of cultural and educational value to a discussion of exhibitions' role in Star Wars's transmedia economy. We argue that Star Wars-themed exhibitions function as a space for managing and refocusing transmedia expansion and narrative coherence. In structure, form, and content, museum exhibitions are complex transmedial sites engaged with current understandings of and practices pertaining to stories and creativity. In particular, we are interested in how these exhibitions manage Star Wars's constantly expanding storyworld and mediate debates about canonicity, authorial hierarchies, and collaborative creation. For some scholars, transmedia storytelling opens up increased possibilities for "participatory authorship" and "collaborative spectatorship"; for others, however, it represents an industrial strategy where participation means the "continuous consumption of texts that narratively and financially supplement a franchise."<sup>4</sup>

Transmedia storytelling problematizes notions of authorship by simultaneously encouraging collaborative productions and reaffirming creative authority. Indeed, the latter assures "audiences that someone is overseeing the transmedia text's expansion and creating meaningful connections between texts."<sup>5</sup> Our chapter shows how Star Wars-themed exhibitions contribute to the processes of author and content management on three levels. First, they position Lucas as the ultimate world architect and creative authority, thereby sidelining other authors' contributions. Second, in the translation of the films to the museum, the curator emerges as another mediating authorial figure, even if Lucasfilm strictly oversees their curatorial agency. Third, they encourage narrative speculation and expansion through interactive activities, but also frequently limit and regulate visitors' creative contributions through copyright and reaffirmations of the canonical boundaries set by Lucasfilm. A study of these three authorial figures provides insight into how exhibitions configure Star Wars's collective memories in the museum

3 See Matt Hills, "Star Wars in Fandom, Film Theory, and the Museum: The Cultural Status of the Cult Blockbuster," in *Movie Blockbusters*, ed. Julian Stringer (London: Routledge, 2003), 178-189; Ian Peters, "Hello Shoppers?: Themed Spaces, Immersive Popular Culture Exhibition, and Museum Pedagogy" (PhD diss., Georgia State University, 2015).

4 Suzanne Scott, "Who's Steering the Mothership? The Role of the Fanboy Auteur in Transmedia Storytelling," in *The Participatory Cultures Handbook*, ed. Aaron Delwiche and Jennifer Jacobs Henderson (New York: Routledge, 2013), 43.

5 Scott, "Role of the Fanboy Auteur," 43.

space, where institutional priorities, visitors' creative contributions, and industrial management intersect and sometimes collide.

## A Brief History of Star Wars-Themed Exhibitions

Star Wars-themed exhibitions played a crucial part in the Star Wars renaissance of the 1990s, marking the end of the so-called Dark Ages, a term often used to describe the period between 1985 and 1991. Following the release of *Return of the Jedi*, no major related productions were planned or realized.<sup>6</sup> The first Star Wars exhibitions accompanied content released concurrently as part of what is known today as the EU. Beginning with Timothy Zahn's successful set of novels, the Thrawn trilogy (1991-1993), a number of notable items were released, thus demonstrating the franchise's continuing creative and economic potential. These included Micro Machines, Topps trading cards, several video games, a new line of comics now licensed to Dark Horse Comics, a number of re-launched Kenner toys, and the introduction of the fan magazine *Star Wars Insider*.<sup>7</sup> Both *The George Lucas Exhibition* in Tokyo in 1993 and *The Magic of Myth* in 1997 were launched in this period of revitalized interest. As with the EU productions, the exhibitions are more than simply ancillary products in a well-oiled marketing machine. They are important sites for understanding the tensions that arise in the process of world-building, brand-building, and world-selling that began after the first trilogy's cinematic run.<sup>8</sup>

Star Wars exhibitions displayed the film's production materials, props, costumes, and narrative tropes in order to position the franchise as a cross-generational cultural symbol. After years of accumulating dust in the Lucas-film warehouses, production materials were unboxed, restored, and made visible for *The George Lucas Exhibition*. Organized by Hata International in collaboration with Lucasfilm, the show celebrated the director's imagination and creativity by presenting his complete oeuvre up to that date. At the same time, the Smithsonian had begun planning its own exhibition project, and requested the same objects for a Star Wars exhibition at the NASM. *The Magic of Myth*, which presented the Star Wars films' production history

6 William Proctor and Matthew Freeman, "'The First Step into a *Smaller World*': The Transmedia Economy of Star Wars," in *Revisiting Imaginary Worlds: A Subcreation Studies Anthology*, ed. Mark J.P. Wolf (New York: Routledge, 2017), 223.

7 Freeman and Proctor, "Transmedia Economy of Star Wars," 225.

8 Freeman and Proctor, "Transmedia Economy of Star Wars," 226.

through an exploration of classical mythologies and heroic narratives, was displayed in various US and Australian venues from 1997 until January 2003. Since then, Star Wars-themed exhibitions have become a constant presence on the international museum circuit, approaching more or less the same selection of objects through the curatorial lenses of art, science, and popular culture. *The Art of Star Wars* (Barbican Centre, 2000); *Star Wars: Art of the Starfighter* (Smithsonian Institution, 2001); *Where Science Meets the Imagination* (Boston Science Museum, 2006); *Star Wars: The Exhibition* (Cité des Sciences, Paris, 2006) ; *Star Wars: Identities* (Montreal Science Centre, 2012); *Rebel, Jedi, Princess, Queen: Star Wars and the Power of Costume* (The Museum of Pop Culture, Seattle 2015); *An Art Odyssey* (Le Café Pixel, France, 2015); and *Visions* (The Mori Arts Center, Tokyo, 2015) are among the best-known examples of the franchise's extended museological life.<sup>9</sup>

Star Wars exhibitions have been profitable for museums, even though their production and rental is expensive. For example, renting the Smithsonian's third Star Wars traveling exhibition *Rebel, Jedi, Princess, Queen: Star Wars and the Power of Costume* for a period of 22 weeks cost \$US 400,000. However, this was still a profitable investment given the large crowds and media attention these shows attract. In March 2014—two weeks before its final run at the Tech Museum of Innovation (San José, California) and 20 venues and nine years into the exhibition's tour—3,000,000 people had visited *Where Science Meets the Imagination*. Moreover, an evaluation conducted for the Boston Museum of Science (MOS), which originally produced *Where Science Meets the Imagination*, indicated that interest in Star Wars exhibitions also impacted general admissions, and encouraged ticket sales to infrequent visitors at a higher rate than other exhibitions in the museum.<sup>10</sup>

As the evaluation explains,

over 75.0% of respondents reported coming to the site that day specifically to see the Star Wars exhibition, [...] about 50.0% of the audiences

9 The exhibitions listed here have circulated widely across several museums, most of them situated in North America, Europe, and Australia. Many exhibitions, in fact, continue to do so (*Identities* and *The Power of Costume*). In this chapter, we list the museums where exhibitions initially opened, omitting—for reasons of space—all the other sites where they have also been presented.

10 Carey E. Tisdal, *Summative Evaluation of Star Wars: Where Science Meets Imagination Museum of Science* (Boston: Tisdal Consulting), 2007, 34. *Exhibitfiles*, accessed February 27, 2017, [http://www.exhibitfiles.org/dfile2/ReviewFinding/247/original/Star\\_\\_Wars\\_\\_Summative\\_\\_EvaluationReport\\_\\_Final.pdf](http://www.exhibitfiles.org/dfile2/ReviewFinding/247/original/Star__Wars__Summative__EvaluationReport__Final.pdf).

across sites were infrequent visitors [and] the exhibition was successful in attracting some atypical science center and science museum visitors than it would first appear by looking at the numbers alone.<sup>11</sup>

The 2013-2014 annual report of the Canada Science and Technology Corporation also highlights that *Where Science Meets the Imagination* was far from a one-hit wonder. Its report on *Identities* listed attendance numbers of 130,000 over a five-month period at the Canada Aviation and Space Museum and “significant media coverage, with more than 80 unpaid mentions.”<sup>12</sup> The report also highlights the positive outcomes of the museum’s cross-promotional strategy, which offered visitors a 50% discount on admission to the Canada Agriculture and Food Museum and the Canada Science and Technology Museum, leading to “a spike in attendance across the board.”<sup>13</sup> The exhibition’s marketability is also evident in the production of specific merchandise sold on site, at the gift shop, and online. In addition to catalogues, this includes postcards, stationery, clothes, posters, and mugs with *Identities* logos and imagery.

## Museums, Canon-Making, and Authorship

Museums and transmedia storytelling both mobilize ideas around individual creativity and authorship. Exhibitions about cinema and its production histories, in particular, frequently emphasize individual creators and canonical films.<sup>14</sup> They display discourses of authorship, offering material evidence of a director’s filmic style and personal obsessions. For example, exhibitions featuring the names of Alfred Hitchcock, Stanley Kubrick, Tim Burton, and, of course, George Lucas, have translated the work of (white, male) film directors into the exhibition format.<sup>15</sup> In doing

11 Tisdal, *Summative Evaluation of Star Wars*, 34.

12 Canada Science and Technology Corporation, 3 *Fascinating Museums: Canada Science and Technology Corporation Annual Report 2013-2014*, accessed February 27, 2017, <http://technoscience.ca/doc/content/cstmc/AnnualReport2013-2014.pdf>, 18.

13 Canada Science and Technology Corporation, *Annual Report*, 18.

14 For a detailed history of cinema-themed exhibitions see Alison Trope, “Le Cinéma pour le Cinéma: Making a Museum of the Moving Image,” *The Moving Image* 1, no.1 (2002): 29-67; and Alison Trope, *Stardust Monuments: The Selling and Saving of Hollywood* (Hanover, NH: Dartmouth College Press, 2012), 11-88.

15 Examples include *Hitchcock and Art: Fatal Coincidences* (Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 2001); *Stanley Kubrick: The Exhibition* (Deutsches Filmmuseum and Deutsches Architekturmuseum 2004); and *Tim Burton* (Museum of Modern Art, 2010).



so, these exhibitions not only perpetuate contested ideas about individual creativity, but also make use of the author as a promotional discourse, just as the most commercially driven media-industrial economies commonly do.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, their use of recognizable names serves as a branding tool throughout synergistic and cross-promotional efforts, providing immediate recognition and encouraging consumption.<sup>17</sup>

In transmedia economies, authors add textual coherence to largely dispersed narratives like Star Wars. Henry Jenkins writes that “the most successful transmedia franchises have emerged when a single creator or creative unit maintains control.”<sup>18</sup> For Jenkins, Star Wars is an example of transmedia storytelling that succeeds because Lucasfilm manages to maintain textual coherence while offering something new with each media expansion. Fans who want to get the whole picture are propelled to “hunt” and “gather” bits and pieces across various Star Wars productions.<sup>19</sup> The task, then, is to determine what constitutes the whole. This, however, has become a terrain of dispute between Star Wars fans, Lucasfilm, and now Disney, due to the growing amount of canonical, quasi-canonical, or apocryphal materials constituting the galaxy. These conflicts over authenticity, labeled by some fans as the “canon wars,”<sup>20</sup> have divided fans between those who recognize Lucas’s authority above all and those who deem the narratives developed in the Star Wars EU and through fans’ creative contributions as equally valid.<sup>21</sup> These controversies are silenced within the context of the exhibition space, which grants Lucas exclusive creative authority.

Exhibition labels, catalogues, audio commentaries, and promotional discourses consistently reference Lucas as the creative force behind Star Wars. Lucas’s life experiences, artistic tastes, and personal commentary are brought into the exhibitions as a framing device to understand creative and narrative outcomes. The emphasis on Lucas was initially established in 1993’s *The George Lucas Exhibition*, which celebrated him as a storyteller and filmmaker with the skills to craft and realize his artistic and narrative vision

16 For a detailed discussion on the commercial auteur see Timothy Corrigan, *A Cinema Without Walls: Movies and Culture After Vietnam* (London: Routledge, 1991).

17 Leora Hadas, “A New Vision: J.J. Abrams, *Star Trek*, and Promotional Authorship,” *Cinema Journal* 56, no. 2 (2017): 46–66.

18 Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006), 106.

19 Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 21.

20 For a detailed overview on the canon wars, see “The Star Wars Canon: Overview,” *Canon Wars*, accessed March 8, 2017, [www.canonwars.com](http://www.canonwars.com).

21 Freeman and Proctor, “Transmedia Economy of Star Wars,” 228.

across several films. The promotional materials and exhibition catalogue that were circulated beyond the gallery produced an image of authorship tied to the idea of a unique creative mind. The catalogue cover and poster even depicted Lucas in the center with his arms crossed, surrounded by Star Wars props and models, thereby explicitly signaling his mastery over the storyworld.

Despite expanding the focus from the director's persona to broader themes, subsequent exhibitions have continued to position Lucas as the visionary architect behind the franchise. *The Magic of Myth's* audio tour provided commentaries through two main narrative strategies. First, Lucas's personal anecdotes detailed the writing process and discussed everyday life experiences, such as how his dog made its way into the film by inspiring the character of Chewbacca.<sup>22</sup> Second, the production crew recounted the creative labor involved in bringing to life Lucas's visions, such as the complex sound effects of the films. More explicitly, museum labels in *The Power of Costume* reaffirmed Lucas as the main source of knowledge: quotes made reference to what "George wanted," what he "told" his creative team, what "was a priority for Lucas," what was done "at Lucas' request," and how the team helped to "realize his vision." Even though the exhibition labels mentioned members of the creative teams and other directors involved in the production of the films, the labels firstly emphasized Lucas's individual vision as the ultimate Star Wars authority.

Official endorsements by Lucas, such as the ones presented in the exhibitions, have become a point of reference for many fans who treasure the narrative coherence of a clearly delimited world. Lucasfilm's textual authority, however, has resulted in a hierarchical system "with multiple levels of authenticity," with the films occupying a position of privilege.<sup>23</sup> Novels, comics, video games, and television series have been set apart as ambiguous products partly dismissed by Lucas as second-tier sub-worlds, in spite of the fact that they are also embraced by Lucasfilm Licensing and fans. For their part, the exhibitions have become places to encounter, remember, and celebrate the films, but they also replicate industrial mandates that obliterate sections of the Star Wars world, particularly those that have been created by other authors through licensing or fan engagement. In doing so, exhibitions construct and disseminate a selective memory of the

22 Antenna Audio Production, *Star Wars: The Magic of Myth* Audio Tour Script, 1999, Accession 07-135, Box 12, National Air and Space Museum, Exhibits Design Division, Exhibit Records, 1991-1999, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington D.C.

23 Freeman and Proctor, "Transmedia Economy of Star Wars," 222.

franchise that does not reflect transmedia storytelling's complex narrative organization.

## Transmedia Memory and Curatorial Agency

Building on Maurice Halbwachs's research on the interrelationship between individual and communal memories, collective memory studies have examined how the ways in which we encounter and share the past in our everyday lives shape perceptions and beliefs.<sup>24</sup> As "memory institutions," museums function as "social entities that select, document, contextualize, preserve, index, and thus canonize elements of humanity's culture, historical narratives, individual, and collective memories."<sup>25</sup> When exhibitions display Star Wars, they clearly function as "memory institutions," by selecting, classifying, and rewriting what we know about the franchise's content and production history. Such systematic processes, where some objects and narratives are included while others are excluded, become particularly relevant when we think of the central role of memory in recalling transmedia narratives across multiple media.

Colin Harvey explains that memory is a defining factor of transmedia storytelling, since "characters, plots, settings, mythologies and themes necessarily have to be remembered from transmedial element to element in order for the various elements to be considered as part of the same storyworld."<sup>26</sup> In writing about encounters with Darth Vader across the films, video games, and novels, he describes how each medium not only requires adaptation to its specific configurations, but also "to engage with the work transmedially by recalling the character of Darth Vader from his other appearances in the broader storyworld."<sup>27</sup> Harvey then introduces the concept of transmedia memory to examine the various material and narrative incarnations of a storyworld across media, assessing the impact of copyright laws, licensing agreements, and other legal restrictions on the making and reception of transmedia narratives. Given museums' roles as "memory institutions," transmedia memory is therefore key to examining how Star Wars exhibitions produce, commodify, and circulate a distinct

24 Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

25 Guy Pessach, "[Networked] Memory Institutions: Social Remembering, Privatization and Its Discontents," *Cardozo Arts and Entertainment Law Journal* 26 (2008): 73.

26 Colin Harvey, *Fantastic Transmedia: Narrative, Play and Memory Across Science Fiction and Fantasy Storyworlds* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 38.

27 Harvey, *Fantastic Transmedia*, 3.

remembrance of the franchise that is tied to Lucasfilm's control over its contours.

Exhibitions contribute to building a cohesive and unified world, recreating a state of transmedia amnesia whereby non-canonical works, including those co-scripted by Lucas which rank low on canonical hierarchies, are removed from official commemorations of the franchise. A notable example is the complete absence from exhibition displays of the notorious *Holiday Special*, the 1978 television program that first introduced the character Boba Fett in an animated short. A number of fans, and especially Lucas, consider the program an "anomalous embarrassment,"<sup>28</sup> but the filmmaker's attempts to keep the 98-minute special out of circulation have been jeopardized by fans who have uploaded it to online video portals. In comparison with the internet, the exhibition space is, of course, easier to regulate; not only are the unwanted memories of Star Wars's past easier to conceal, but exhibitions also permit Lucasfilm to rewrite Star Wars's official history. This has been the case with the character of Boba Fett. Labels in *Identities* explained his origins by referring to his second appearance in *The Empire Strikes Back*, not his infamous debut in the *Holiday Special*. This intentional act of omission goes even further: its animated section was erased from the franchise's history in favor of *The Clone Wars*, which was the only animated production on display.

Rewritings of the Star Wars canon thus raise the question of how much Lucasfilm intervenes in the curatorial process of the exhibitions, regulating what to remember as well as the ways in which visitors are invited to engage with the displays. When we look at the makeup of curatorial teams—which, among museum curators and scientific experts, included in some instances in-house personnel—Lucasfilm's role becomes clearer. For example, Laela French, current Director of Archives at the Lucas Museum of Narrative Art, co-curated the *Identities* and *The Power of Costume* exhibitions. While we know little about how curatorial responsibilities are distributed in these highly interdisciplinary teams, it would seem that collaboration and coproduction are important aspects of the process. However, archival research on the development of *The Magic of Myth* a few years earlier illuminates the process and provides a model to understand how Lucasfilm oversees curatorial teams' proposals through their licensing agreements.

Contracts signed between Lucasfilm and the Smithsonian demanded that displays should only be composed of "original creative elements [...]"

28 Will Brooker, *Using the Force: Creativity, Community and Star Wars Fans* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 103.

which appear in and have been associated with the motion pictures.”<sup>29</sup> The vagueness of the term “original creative elements” seems open to interpretation, but the exclusion of the EU and other non-canonized productions like the *Holiday Special* indicates a reading of “original” very much in line with Lucas’s delineation of canonical texts and his consistent privileging of the films. Lucasfilm’s right to “review and comment upon the overall ‘look’ of the exhibit” restrains curatorial independence even further.<sup>30</sup> What is more, other typical curatorial activities were also covered by the agreement, including public programs, audio tours, crowd control, exhibition promotion, book production, and the premiere event. The agreement granted Lucasfilm final say over the objects and narratives on display as much as the ways in which the museum designed interactions with the public.

As a result of these regulations, exhibitions contribute to the strengthening of a sanctioned but incomplete version of the Star Wars world, offering details about the galaxy and its inhabitants without ever contradicting canonical readings or including “secondary” texts. *The Magic of Myth*, *Where Science Meets the Imagination*, *Identities*, and *The Power of Costume* reinforce existing hierarchies that position Lucas as the only essential creative contributor. Despite these restrictive exhibition protocols, curatorial teams still open up new points of entry into Star Wars by offering scientific, technological, and anthropological understandings of the characters, geographies, and customs of the storyworld. In this way, exhibitions help build a rich and complex world where humans coexist with equally developed alien societies and technologies. *Identities*, in its exploration of subject formation around the character of Luke and Anakin, offered a tour of Star Wars’s different societies and species, including a description of different Force-sensitivities and a closer look at planets and species that could not be given as much detail in the films. While curatorial teams are indeed subjected to strict regulations that shape what and how we remember Star Wars, the exhibitions’ contributions go beyond the mere encyclopedic recounting and expansion of texts. Curatorial teams behind exhibition design bring about novel readings of Star Wars that, using Jenkins’s term, act as “cultural activators” propelling visitors and fans to decipher, speculate, and elaborate further.<sup>31</sup>

29 Licence Agreement, 1995, *Star Wars: The Magic of Myth*, Accession 11-072, Box 1, National Air and Space Museum, Exhibits Design Division, Exhibit Records, 1991-1999, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington D.C., 1.

30 License Agreement, 2.

31 Jenkins, *Convergence Culture*, 95.

We can thus think of exhibition curatorial teams as transmedia co-authors, mediating collective memories, rewriting franchise history, and generating fan commentary within the limitations of copyright and licensing agreements that regulate the process. As Jenny Kidd explains, contemporary exhibition practices are transmedial and are enmeshed in the processes of scripting and distributing information through different media forms such as films, museum labels, audio guides, interactive games, and online platforms, among others.<sup>32</sup> In translating Star Wars films from the screen into the museum's transmedial immersive environments, curatorial teams make use of descriptions (labels, audio guides, texts), images (stills, set photography, concept art, film excerpts, and additionally produced materials), sounds (sound effects, dialogue passages, scores), and interactive elements (games, displays that have to be activated, hands-on activities). *Identities* featured short explanatory films and interactive games that used original footage from the first two trilogies and animations and charts, each providing insight and expounding different aspects of the exhibition's themes of subjectivity and psychology. In *The Magic of Myth*, the narrative was less structured around immersive media installations, yet it also included a film produced specifically for the exhibition that showcased interviews with the main actors and Lucas, excerpts from the first trilogy, and films Lucas drew inspiration from.<sup>33</sup> Curators developed this "museum movie" so that visitors could make transversal connections between the objects and the Star Wars films.

Exhibition media and interactive elements encourage visitors to participate in the expansion of the storyworld. Edutainment activities invite visitors to use their creativity (within the boundaries of approved canons and selective historical accounts of its past). In *Where Science Meets the Imagination*, MOS included smaller creative tasks. The exhibition put visitors into the role of engineers, who were asked to design their own virtual cyborgs, droid characters, levitating vehicles, spaceports, moisture farms, and walled Jawa towns at different workstations. *Identities* went even further and made an interactive game the driving force behind its exhibition narrative. The exhibition was entirely structured around an "Identity Quest" where visitors were asked to translate their personality traits into a new

32 Jenny Kidd, *Museums in the New Mediascape: Transmedia, Participation, Ethics* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 3.

33 Meta Filmworks, Exhibition proposal and bid for film project, 1995. *Star Wars: The Magic of Myth*, Accession 11-072, Box 1, National Air and Space Museum, Exhibits Design Division, Exhibit Records, 1991-1999, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington D.C.

Star Wars character. In twelve steps, visitors built their avatars by selecting their characters' species, gender, family, culture, homeworld, mentors, friends, defining life events, occupation, and values, and ended by choosing whether they wanted to give in to the dark side or not. Before visitors left the exhibition, their character's biography was visualized on a large screen, with references to the choices made throughout the quest. Character images and biographies were later available for download via email.

Lucasfilm's right to veto curatorial proposals as expressed through licensing agreements also impacts the range of activities and participatory elements present in the exhibitions. When the Smithsonian's educational department proposed the activity "Write the next episode," which invited visitors to speculate about what happens after *Return of the Jedi*,<sup>34</sup> Lucasfilm rejected the proposal and referred to potential intellectual property (IP) infractions, as visitors would have relied on copyrighted materials.<sup>35</sup> This decision also resonated with Lucas's ambiguous relation to fan fiction, especially works with graphic descriptions of sex, violence, and substance abuse.<sup>36</sup> The main "Identity Quest" in *Identities* could be interpreted as an opening toward user-generated content, even though restrictions in the avatar's circulation and use point more towards a refinement of IP control. Before visitors could access their avatars and personal biographies, they had to agree to hand over all image rights to Lucasfilm. They could share their avatars online if they did not modify them or remove the trademark, thus contributing with their own labor to the exhibition's promotional gain through social media. Of course, agreement to terms and conditions does not necessarily mean user compliance, but it is still important to note that this form of directed user-generated content comes closer to "fanagement"<sup>37</sup> than to collaborative authorship and participatory spectatorship.

The regulated practices of curation within the controlled space of the museum therefore represent an ambiguous development common for trans-media projects. Visitors to Star Wars exhibitions are invited to partake in the

34 Memorandum from exhibit committee to Mary Henderson, Impact Statement Star Wars, September 30, 1993, *Star Wars: The Magic of Myth*, Accession 11-072, Miscellaneous 1, National Air and Space Museum, Exhibits Design Division, Exhibit Records, 1991-1999, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington D.C.

35 Memorandum from Gwen Crider to Nadya Makovenyi, Star Wars Options, December 12, 1995, *Star Wars: The Magic of Myth*, Accession 11-072, Miscellaneous 1991-1997, Folder 2, National Air and Space Museum, Exhibits Design Division, Exhibit Records, 1991-1999, Smithsonian Institution Archives, Washington D.C.

36 See Brooker, *Using the Force*, 164-171.

37 Matt Hills, "Torchwood's Trans-transmedia: Media Tie-ins and Brand 'Fanagement,'" *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies* 9, no. 2 (2012): 409-428.



expansion of a universe, although participation is circumscribed to notions of canonicity, and unapproved expansions are legally restricted. Exhibitions are as much a direct answer to fan participation through interactivity and appropriation of collaborative authorship as they are a re-installment of Lucas as main authority. What fans are encouraged to engage with in these exhibitions is determined by Lucas's vision of the canon, and this is equally true for the characters and stories those exhibitions facilitate and allow them to create. Although the museum might not manage "to impose an imagined consensus on a [fan] community that thrives on debate,"<sup>38</sup> visitors who do not participate in fan-specific debates and practices are more likely to remember this version of Star Wars as the authentic one. In this way, exhibitions contribute to consolidating a selective form of collective memory that is nonetheless linked to the franchise's transmedia economy.

## Conclusion

How then can we use these insights on the history and role of Star Wars-themed exhibitions for further investigations into the musealization of transmedia storytelling projects? As Matt Hills writes, the museum has been a site where the "struggle over Star Wars's cultural status can and has been played out."<sup>39</sup> While Hills's approach draws on an understanding of the role of the museum in the discursive separation between economy and culture, our study examines the role of the museum in transmedia storytelling within a constantly growing franchise. Arguably, all of the exhibitions elevate Star Wars's cultural value, but they are also central to understanding the franchise's transmedia economy.

On the one hand, they produce selective cultural memories built around Star Wars's cinematic releases. In doing so, they sideline works that are not sanctioned by Lucasfilm and influence how visitors build up dialogical relationships with non-canonical texts such as those of the EU. In short, what fans and visitors are encouraged to memorize in these exhibitions is determined by Lucas's vision of the canon. On the other hand, the museum is a distinct space in which to investigate the relationship between producers and consumers, and the different stakes and unequal power relations among them. As such, Star Wars-themed exhibitions should not be seen as simply another entry in an already long list of franchise products. Rather,

38 Brooker, *Using the Force*, 113.

39 Hills, "Star Wars in Fandom, Film Theory, and the Museum," 197.



Star Wars-themed exhibitions offer a significant approach to investigating the production of culture as well as the differences between cultures of production, including the interaction among filmmakers, media industries, curators, and visitors. Moreover, Star Wars is not the only franchise that makes use of themed exhibitions. Similar projects based on franchises such as Star Trek, Jurassic Park, The Lord of the Rings, Harry Potter, and The Hunger Games have circulated in museum and exhibition venues worldwide, signaling a growing interest in the musealization of transmedia storyworlds.<sup>40</sup> With our focus on authorship, canonicity, collective memory, and visitor participation, our approach offers a model for further research on how curatorial practices materialize in transmedia projects through the exhibition format.

*We wish to thank Haidee Wasson and Zach Melzer for their ongoing support and generous feedback on earlier drafts of this chapter.*

40 Examples include *Star Trek* (Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, 1992), *Dinosaurs of Jurassic Park* (American Museum of Natural History, 1993), *The Lord of the Rings Motion Picture Trilogy: The Exhibition* (Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa, 2002), *Harry Potter: The Exhibition* (Museum of Science and Industry, 2009), *The Hunger Games: The Exhibition* (San Francisco Palace of Fine Arts, 2016).

## 11. Adapting the Death Star into LEGO

The Case of LEGO Set #10188

*Mark J.P. Wolf*<sup>1</sup>

When one of the world's most famous toymakers decided to license one of the world's most popular media franchises, a successful new line of products perhaps seemed inevitable. The first Star Wars LEGO set appeared in 1999 and, since then, over 230 different LEGO Star Wars sets have appeared, as well as LEGO Star Wars video games, books, pajamas, and other merchandise. Considering the importance of the Death Star within the Star Wars saga, it is not surprising that a LEGO set would be made of it, and set #10188 demonstrates how the film scenes on which it is based, the set's audience, and the process of adaptation itself were all carefully taken into account during the design of the set.

Most of the work found in adaptation studies considers the adaptation of a narrative from one medium into another (novels to films, films into television shows or video games, and so forth), but in the realm of transmedial franchises set in imaginary worlds, we also find adaptation into toys and playsets, using other kinds of media, such as LEGO bricks. Adaptation into a physical playset is qualitatively different from narrative adaptation between audiovisual media, since it involves not so much the adaptation of a narrative, but rather the settings, objects, vehicles, and characters from which a narrative can be interactively recreated by the user. At the same time, this kind of adaptation still shares many of the same issues and processes and can be discussed in relation to them (for example, video games also deal with adaptation into interactive form, and the narrative recreation made possible by a particular playset may still require the adaptation of the original narrative on which it is based). The adaptation of the Death Star from the Star Wars movies into LEGO set #10188 (released in 2008) provides a good example of such an adaptation, and reveals many of the concerns in the processes involved.

Other traditional forms of adaptation also involve transformation into a physical form. When a novel or screenplay is adapted into a film, for

<sup>1</sup> This chapter is an edited version of my essay "Adapting the Death Star into LEGO: The Case of LEGO Set #10188," in *LEGO Studies: Examining the Building Blocks of a Transmedial Phenomenon*, ed. Mark J.P. Wolf (New York: Routledge, 2014).

example, descriptions must be fleshed out into visible designs and then into physical sets, props, and costumes, a process that can change an original conception due to its lack of practicality or level of vagueness in which specifics are lacking and have to be assumed or extrapolated. While stage plays and screenplays can be written with the constraints of adaptation in mind, making the process easier, the malleability of the end medium also aids the process. LEGO, the bricks of which have been produced in thousands of specialized shapes since their first incarnation appeared in 1949, is a far more versatile medium to use for adaptation than are other older building sets like Meccano (1908), A.C. Gilbert's Erector Set (1913), the Tinkertoy Construction Set (1914), and Lincoln Logs (1916), which are more limited in the shapes one can construct with their elements and the ways in which those elements can be fit together.<sup>2</sup> Thus, it should come as no surprise that while other building sets have appeared in dozens of different sets, the much-younger LEGO has appeared in several thousand different sets.

Concurrent with the rise and popularity of building sets was the development of the *playset*, the various elements of which are designed around a particular theme or location, and are usually complete in and of themselves, needing little or no assembly. While less flexible than building sets, playsets were often more representational than the abstracted versions of things built from pieces of a building set, and had more complete and detailed environments than those that one could construct with a building set. This would, of course, change once LEGO became developed enough to match the level of detail and functionality found in playsets, but this would not happen for some time. Thus, it is to the development of the playset that we must next turn.

## Development of the Playset

While the creation of miniature scenarios dates back to the models found in ancient Egyptian tombs, such as that of Mehenkwetre (circa 2000 BC), which reveal what daily life in Egypt was like, the earliest commercially produced playsets were dollhouses. German companies produced miniatures for

2 Of course some sets, such as Tinkertoy, allows more flexibility if the models in question are built at much bigger scales, but the stick-and-spool nature of its elements, compared to the blocks used in LEGO, makes each medium better at one type of building over another, just as vector graphics and raster graphics in video games each have their own advantages and disadvantages.

collectors in the nineteenth century and, by the 1920s, dollhouses and their accessories were produced by American companies such as the TynieToy company, who made replicas of New England homes. After World War II, dollhouses and their furnishing were mass-produced, making them more affordable and available as toys, but, at the same time, they were less detailed and simplified due to the demands of mass production. Other playsets appeared around the same time, from companies such as Tobias Cohn Company and Remco Industries, and most notably from the Marx Toy Company, which became one of the largest toy companies in the world during the mid-twentieth century.<sup>3</sup>

Begun in 1919, the Marx Toy Company made metal playsets during the 1930s and 1940s, like the *Sunnyside Service Station* (1934) and the *Roadside Service Station* (1935). After the development of plastics in the 1940s, production became easier and less expensive, and the number of playsets increased, as did their popularity. In the 1950s, Marx produced more generic sets, like the *Western Ranch Set* (1951), *Cowboy and Indian Camp* (1953), and *Arctic Explorer Play Set* (1958), as well as sets based on actual events like the Civil War and real places like *Fort Apache* (1951) and *Fort Dearborn* (1952). Other sets were adaptations of existing properties in other media, like the *Roy Rogers Ranch Set* (1952), *Lone Ranger Rodeo* (1952), *Walt Disney's Davy Crockett at the Alamo* (1955), and *Gunsmoke Dodge City* (1960). The transmedial nature of these sets, which played on the popularity of existing franchises, encouraged the sale of playsets in general. The Marx Toy Company made even more playsets during the 1960s and 1970s, and the number of playsets based on transmedial franchises increased, including sets based on *Gunsmoke* (1955-1975), *Wagon Train* (1957-1965), *The Untouchables* (1959-1963), MGM's *Ben-Hur* (1959), and more.<sup>4</sup>

Other companies realized the value of known franchises and hurried to buy up rights. During the 1970s, the Mego Corporation licensed Edgar Rice Burroughs's works, and produced toys for the Planet of the Apes, Marvel Comics, DC Comics, and Star Trek franchises, and even *The Wizard of Oz and His Emerald City* (1974) playset. Properties that were not already known by the public were considered more risky, and in 1976 Mego turned down an offer to license toys based on an upcoming science-fiction film named

3 According to the Marx Toy Company Museum, which claims that "During the 1950's, Louis Marx & Co. became the 'largest toy manufacturer in the world,' with over one-third of all toys in the U.S. being Marx toys." See "The History of Marx," *Marx Toy Museum*, accessed May 15, 2017, [http://www.marxtoymuseum.com/info\\_marx\\_history.htm](http://www.marxtoymuseum.com/info_marx_history.htm).

4 See Russell S. Kern, *Toy Kings: The Story of Louis Marx & Company, Volume 1: 1919-1954*, and *Volume 2: 1955-1982* (Colorado Springs, Colorado: Atomic Home Videos LLC, 2011).

*Star Wars* (1977). The license went to Kenner Products, who produced over 100 different action figures from the original *Star Wars* film trilogy, along with several playsets, including *Death Star Space Station* (1978), *Cantina Adventure Set* (1978), *Creature Cantina Action Play Set* (1979), *Death Star* (1979), *Droid Factory* (1979), *Land of the Jawas Action Play Set* (1979), and *Millennium Falcon Spaceship* (1979).<sup>5</sup> Kenner sold over 300 million *Star Wars* action figures (rebranded by Hasbro, Kenner's owner, after 1999) and became the largest *Star Wars* merchandiser of the twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> But after the first decade of the 21st century, LEGO outgrew Hasbro, with the help of over 200 sets of LEGO *Star Wars* merchandise.<sup>7</sup>

## The Road to LEGO *Star Wars* sets

The genius behind LEGO was the combination of building sets and playsets into a single product, resulting in the introduction of the LEGO System in which every piece fit together with every other piece, the first "system" in the toy industry. When LEGO bricks first appeared on the market, building sets like Lincoln Logs and Tinkertoy could build specific kinds of things (e.g. log cabins and stick-and-spool structures or vehicles, respectively), but they generally were not used to build entire settings, nor did they contain characters that children could use as avatars to vicariously experience what they had built. Playsets, on the other hand, feature detailed settings and characters to inhabit them, but they were limited to what they already represented; everything was ready-made, and little or no new building could be done. LEGO, however, suggested settings that could be built (which determined what pieces came with each set), but children could build other things with the same bricks, and could even combine multiple sets together to build even larger settings.

The gradual merging of the playset and building set can be seen in the early development of LEGO. The first plastic bricks, Automatic Binding Bricks were produced by the company in 1949 and the first set in the LEGO system, *Town Plan No. 1*, appeared in 1955, along with other sets that could

5 See "Kenner *Star Wars* Catalogs," *Plaid Stallions*, accessed May 15, 2017, <http://www.plaidstallions.com/starwars/index.html>.

6 "Kenner *Star Wars* Action Figures," *Wikipedia*, last modified May 4, 2017, accessed May 15, 2017, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenner\\_Star\\_Wars\\_action\\_figures](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kenner_Star_Wars_action_figures).

7 See Christian Wienberg, "Lego Outgrows Hasbro, Mattel as 'Star Wars' Sets Boost Profit," *Bloomberg*, March 1, 2012, accessed May 15, 2017, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-03-01/lego-outgrows-hasbro-mattel-as-star-wars-sets-boost-profit.html>.

be combined with it to enlarge the town. The cars, trees, and especially the miniature people, however, were still like the plastic figures found in other playsets; each was a single piece that could be used during play, but not changed. LEGO wheels, and the bricks to which they attached, came in 1961,<sup>8</sup> allowing children to build their own vehicles. But characters, so crucial to the playset because of their role as children's avatars, would not become buildable for some time. In 1963, *Master Builder Set* #004 displayed on its box cover a human-like figure built of LEGO bricks, but as a construction around two dozen bricks tall, it was more of a statue than a usable avatar, and much too large to be used with typical LEGO vehicles and buildings. The following year, several small sets appeared that were character-based; *Seesaw* #803, 3 *Little Indians* #805, *Cowboy and Pony* #806, and *Doll Set* #905, and another set, *Clowns* #321, appeared in 1965. In all these sets, the characters had no faces or jointed limbs; yet were a step closer to a usable avatar in their design and smaller size. Over these years, dozens of vehicle sets appeared, and vehicles remained the main avatars for LEGO play. One set, *Baggage Carts* #622 of 1970, even had a few bricks that represented the cart's driver, but only as a feature of the cart rather than a character that could be used separately. Six of the *Basic Sets* released in 1973 (#1, #2, #3, #4, #5, and #8), along with *Building Set* #105 and *Building Set* #115, show brick-built people amidst the scenes on their boxes, but still the blocky, faceless kind. It was not until 1974 that LEGO finally introduced specialized pieces representing people, which had round heads, faces, and jointed arms and hands, and which were scaled to fit vehicles and buildings. Nine sets were introduced that featured these human figures, and one set, *Family* #200, was made up entirely of people.<sup>9</sup>

While the introduction of human figures broadened the possibilities for sets, the scale of these figures was still large enough that they could not be included with some sets, which had smaller vehicles and buildings representing larger structures. In 1975, a new kind of LEGO figure appeared, one that did not have a face or jointed arms, but which had a specialized head, a torso piece, and a single piece representing legs and feet. These would be updated over the next few years, until in 1978 when the modern minifigure would appear, with a painted face, movable arms and legs, and

8 Daniel Lipkowitz, *The LEGO Book* (London: Dorling Kindersley, 2009), 21.

9 The other eight sets with people were *Antique Car* #196, *Aeroplane and Pilot* #250, *Windmill with Miller and His Wife* #251, *Locomotive with Driver & Passenger* #252, *Complete Kitchen with 2 Figures* #263, *Livingroom with 2 Figures* #264, *Complete Bathroom with 1 Figure* #265, and *Children's Room* #266, according to Sebastian Eggers, et al., ed., *LEGO Collector: Collector's Guide* (Dreieich: Fantasia Verlag GMBH, 2008), 94-95.

hand pieces that connected to the arm pieces. Although the minifigure would eventually replace the larger LEGO people, the two were produced contemporaneously, even appearing together in some sets (like *Mother with Baby Carriage* #208 and *Nursery* #297, both from 1978, and *Bathroom* #261, *Family Room* #268, and *Kitchen* #269, all from 1979), with the minifigures positioned as babies or children and the larger people as parents and adults.

Minifigures were featured in the sets for the new Town, Castle, and Space themes, allowing their structures to be populated with characters (minifigures would be an important part of set #10188, which included 24 minifigures and droids, the most to come with any LEGO Star Wars set up to that time). Along with the new application of themes, LEGO sets were now available that had all the features of other types of playsets, completing the merger between building sets and playsets. As the sets were designed at minifigure scale, the larger people no longer appeared in sets after 1979.

Themed sets meant that LEGO could be designed to connect with prevailing themes in popular culture at any given time, yet without licensing any particular property or franchise; the appearance of a space theme, in 1978, would certainly have fit in with the new popularity of science-fiction projects due to the continuing success of the Star Wars franchise. New space-themed sets would be released every year during the 1980s and 1990s, including subseries of sets known as Blacktron, Futuron, Space Police, M:Tron, Unitron, and U.F.O. The subseries designations grouped sets together into LEGO's own in-house brands; despite the rise of franchising and merchandising tie-ins during the 1980s and 1990s, LEGO preferred to create their own original properties. But that policy changed in 1999, when LEGO licensed its first property since the early 1970s,<sup>10</sup> and the first LEGO Star Wars sets appeared.

The change in this decades-long policy may have been in part due to financial concerns. In 1998, the company had experienced a decline in profits for the first time since 1932, signaling that changes were needed (the company would experience further losses in 2003 and 2004).<sup>11</sup> Apart from selling some foreign properties and reducing their staff and the variety of

10 Some of the earliest LEGO sets included brand names, though they were typically from the automotive industry, like the *Esso Trailer* #252, *VW Beetle* #260, and *Esso Filling Station* #310, all of 1958, or the *Citroën DS 19* #603 and *Fiat 1800* #605, both of 1965, or the *Shell Service Station* #648 of 1971. LEGO also produced some bathing rings and a wooden pull-toy featuring Disney characters in 1956. Lipkowitz, *The LEGO Book*, 156.

11 James Delingpole, "When Lego Lost Its Head—and How this Toy Story Got Its Happy Ending," *Mail Online*, December 18, 2009, accessed May 15, 2017, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/moslive/article-1234465/When-Lego-lost-head--toy-story-got-happy-ending.html>.

brick components produced (both about by half), LEGO also changed its thinking about the kinds of toys it produced. According to reporter James Delingpole,

What Lego's staff also had to do was abandon their high-mindedness. Typical of this was the internal row that had broken out in 1999, when a product tie-in with *Star Wars* was first mooted: the older company hands had objected on the grounds that any product with 'wars' in the title set a bad moral example. The *Star Wars* series went on to become one of Lego's biggest sellers.<sup>12</sup>

Aside from helping the company's sales, the success of these licensed sets led to the production of over 200 different LEGO Star Wars sets, as well as the purchase of other licenses, including ones for the Harry Potter, Pirates of the Caribbean, Batman, Minecraft, and Lord of the Rings franchises. But Star Wars would remain the company's most lucrative license.

## Adapting Star Wars into LEGO

Adaptation into a physical playset differs from other forms of adaptation, particularly due to the kind of open-ended play that a playset encourages. Even adaptation into a sandbox-style video game, which may be the form of audiovisual media closest to a playset, generally restricts what the player can do more than a physical playset will (although a video game can offer kinds of interaction that a physical playset cannot, in return). Instead of merely adapting a narrative, a playset will be designed to provide its user all the elements needed to reenact a particular narrative, without requiring that the narrative be reenacted. Star Wars playsets (LEGO and otherwise) include models of characters, vehicles, props (such as weapons), and locations, with which particular scenes from the movies can be recreated by the user. Typically, these characters, vehicles, props, and locations will be simplified, with their recognizable and distinct features exaggerated, resulting in caricatures that still are able to evoke their original versions. Thus their overall shapes, color palettes, and distinctive details, particularly those clearly shown in the films, become the criteria behind the design of a LEGO Star Wars set.

12 Delingpole, "When Lego Lost Its Head."



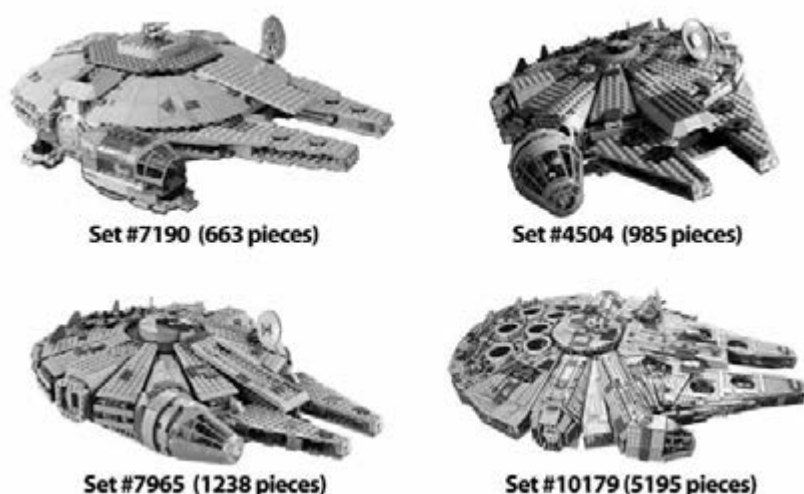


Fig. 11.1: Four different LEGO incarnations of the *Millennium Falcon*, ranging in resolution from 663 pieces to 5195 pieces

In the world of LEGO, the least caricatured sets are those that are models intended for display purposes (which are usually not playsets to be used with minifigures), including the models of the LEGO “Architecture” sub-brand (made up of the “Architect” and “Landmark” series), sets #21000 to #21021 (as of 2014), as well as the *LEGO Death Star II* set #10143, which depicted the unfinished second Death Star from *Return of the Jedi*. Set #10143 was not nearly as popular as set #10188, according to online customer reviews, and its “unfinished” nature gave it a much more detailed appearance and silhouette, rendering it more difficult to adapt into a recognizable LEGO set.

Nor is the Death Star the only setting or vehicle to be featured in multiple LEGO incarnations. The *Millennium Falcon* has appeared four times (see figure 11.1), as set #7190 (released in 2000) at 663 pieces (and 12” across); set #4504 (released in 2004) at 985 pieces; set #7965 (released in 2011) at 1238 pieces; and set #10179 (released in 2007) at 5195 pieces (by far the largest size, at 33” long, 22” wide, 8” tall). While minifigures can be used inside all four sets, only set #10179 is actually scaled to match the minifigure size, and is the least caricatured of the four sets; it features the most details on the ship’s exterior, as well as recreated spaces within the ship’s interior.

Of all the Star Wars models, the first Death Star is one of the most iconic designs found in the franchise because it can be recognizably represented with the simplest of graphics: a circle with a line across its diameter, with a

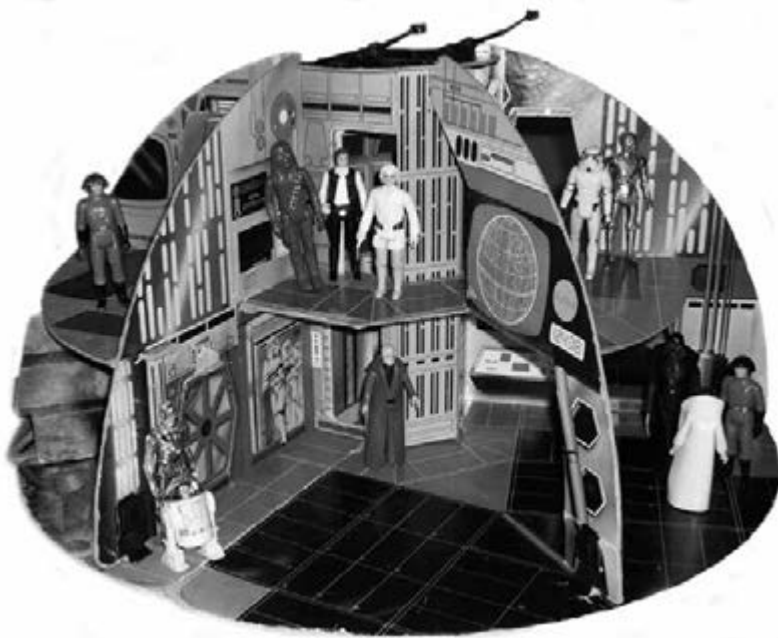


Fig. 11.2: The Kenner *Death Star* set from 1979, designed for use with the Kenner action figures

smaller circle inside the upper half of the larger circle. These lines represent the two distinctive features on the Death Star's otherwise nondescript gray spherical exterior, the equatorial trench and the concave crater-like depression which focuses the multiple beams of the superlaser into one large planet-destroying beam (never mind that such a beam ought to simply burn a hole into a planet, rather than make a planet explode immediately the way Alderaan does, as though it were made entirely of flammable material). Thus the first Death Star is, in one sense, a good candidate for adaptation, since it has so few distinctive features needed for identification, making it so easily recognizable. And indeed, the Death Star of set #10188 does have a spherical shape, equatorial trench, and superlaser crater, although each of these features is reproduced to a different degree.

The two Kenner Death Star models, the plastic *Death Star Space Station* (1978) playset, and the cardboard *Death Star* (1979) (see figure 11.2), could be used with Kenner's action figures, but both represented only a section of the spherical shape. The 1978 set was wedge-shaped, standing four levels high, extending from an elevator shaft connecting the floors out to a section of the station's curved hull. The station was open on both sides between the shaft and hull, and its floors, from bottom to top, represented the garbage

compactor level, a control room, an elevated walkway and bridge, and a laser cannon at the top level. The 1979 set used cardboard dividers shaped into a two-level hemisphere, with images on walls and floors depicting the various locations, similar to the rooms of a dollhouse, although the rooms opened all around the hemisphere, leaving no room for an exterior except at the very top where a large gun was mounted. The design of the 1979 set was the closest to set #10188, which would add the bottom hemisphere, completing the Death Star's shape, and include more exterior features, making it more recognizable as the Death Star. Both Kenner sets were designed for the company's 3.75-inch action figures, which required a scale much larger than the typical height (1.5 to 2 inches, depending on headgear) of LEGO minifigures. Thus, the smaller scale LEGO minifigures made larger-scale adaptations more practical than the earlier Kenner action figures, giving the Death Star a better chance of being adapted in more detail.

### **The LEGO *Death Star* Set #10188**

The LEGO *Death Star* set #10188 was released in 2008, the year after the other LEGO Death Star, set #10143, was retired after only two years of production. Whereas set #10143 was not designed to be used with minifigures, set #10188 was (and included 24 minifigures), leading to its greater success and desirability. Its design, like a spherical dollhouse, features four levels, with four small areas at the top level: the Imperial Conference Room, a droid maintenance facility, the Overbridge Control Room (with its viewscreen), and a gunnery area with two rotating gun towers; four larger areas on the second level down from the top, including Docking Bay 327, the Superlaser Fire Control room (with the Docking Bay 327 Control Room up in the corner, where it can overlook the Docking Bay), the Detention Block, and the Emperor's Throne Room; five areas on the third level down, including the Garbage Compactor Room, Tractor Beam controls, the chasm that Luke swings across (extending down to the bottom level), a garage-like work area, and a Laser Cannon room; and four small areas of hallways and storage on the very bottom level, which is harder to access due to the overhanging level above (these areas contain very little and are not themed to specific locations in the films). Finally, an elevator shaft is set vertically into the center of the model, connecting all the levels together with an open-sided elevator. The inclusion of the Emperor's throne room, along with minifigures of two red-cloaked Imperial guards, the Emperor, and a black-suited short-haired Jedi Luke, and images on the box showing Luke in a lightsaber fight with

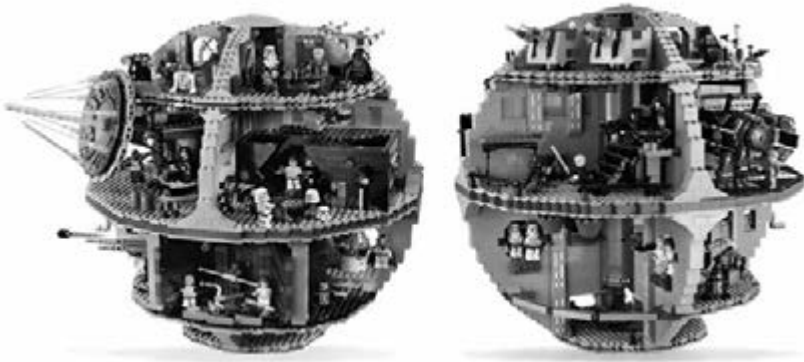


Fig. 11.3: The LEGO *Death Star* set #10188 (2008), as seen from the front and back

Darth Vader, indicate that the set was designed for the reenactment of scenes occurring on *both* Death Stars, though all the other areas are from the first Death Star (a similar conflation appears in the set *Unexpected Gathering* (#79003), which combines things from before and after Bilbo's adventure in Peter Jackson's *The Hobbit* trilogy).

Despite the small size of LEGO minifigures, Death Star set #10188 is still by far the most out-of-scale of all the Star Wars LEGO sets (see figure 11.3). British astrophysicist Dr. Curtis Saxton has assembled detailed analyses of various Star Wars-related topics on his webpages at *TheForce.net*, including a discussion of the size of the first and second Death Stars, based on evidence from the films, books, magazines, and other sources, which can be vague or even appear to conflict.<sup>13</sup> According to these sources, the first Death Star is said to have 84 internal levels, each composed of 357 sublevels, for a total of 29,988 sublevels, and the diameters of the first and second Death Stars are, according to official figures, 160 kilometers (99.4194 miles) and 900 kilometers (559.234 miles), respectively. Assuming the typical minifigure height (4 bricks tall, about 1.5 inches) is scaled to about six feet (a ratio of 1:48), scale models of the two Death Stars would have diameters of 3.3333 kilometers (about 2.0712 miles) and 18.75 kilometers (about 11.6507 miles). Thus, set #10188 is out-of-scale by several orders of magnitude, even for the smaller of the two Death Stars.

But a playset, of course, is judged by what it enables its users to do; and in the case of a playset licensed from a movie, it is also judged by how well it

13 Curtis Saxton, "Death Stars," *Star Wars Technical Commentaries*, last modified April 11, 2005, accessed May 15, 2017, <http://www.theforce.net/swtc/ds/index.html>.

allows scenes from the movies to be reenacted. So how well does set #10188 represent the Death Stars, as seen in *A New Hope* and *Return of the Jedi*? First, we must determine the importance of the Death Stars in each film, and the relative importance of the various locations found within them. *A New Hope* has a running time of 2 hours, 4 minutes, and 38 seconds (2:04:38), according to the 2004 DVD release. Of that time, the Death Star, or part of it, is onscreen for 40:37, which is almost a third of the film's running time.<sup>14</sup> Of the 40:37, the majority of the time, 34:11 consists of interior shots, while exterior shots take up 6:26.

With a design like a spherical dollhouse, set #10188 lacks an exterior shell, and thus has few exterior features. The equatorial trench is only represented by a layer of gray bricks separating the upper and lower halves, but the superlaser crater is present, and firing. The crater's disc is attached to a gun mount, making it movable and positionable, unlike in the film, combining its properties with those of a laser cannon. The other surface features represented in set #10188 are the two gun towers on the top level (see figure 11.4); while the other three areas of this level represent interiors, the gun towers are exterior features, and are designed to move together in unison. Together, these two features represent about 20 seconds of actual screen time (2 seconds of the superlaser crater firing, and 18 seconds of various shots of the gun towers), but as weaponry, they are memorable and important to the story. Thus set #10188 represents the Death Star's exterior to a degree (Darth Vader's TIE fighter is also included, which appears in scenes on the Death Star's exterior).

The Death Star's interior is represented by a number of locations in the film: the most time (8:51) is spent on the connected areas of the Detention Block, made up of a reception area (2:05), hallway (1:47), and Leia's cell (49 seconds), and the Garbage Compactor Room directly below it (4:10) (see figure 11.5). These areas are all represented, and likewise connected, in set #10188. The next largest amount of time (8:39) is spent on the connected areas of Docking Bay 327, where the *Millennium Falcon* is docked, and the Docking Bay 327 Control Room which overlooks it; 2:26 is spent in wider shots of Docking Bay 327, while 1:06 is spent showing a side area where R2D2 and C-3PO are hiding, and 5:07 is spent on scenes in the Docking

14 Not including the 1:09 of wireframe graphics representing the Death Star, 12 seconds of which are the wireframe trench graphics viewed by the X-wing pilots, and 57 seconds of the wireframe graphics presented at the briefing that occurs on Yavin 4 before the attack (in these graphics, the Death Star's superlaser crater is drawn over equatorial trench, not above it). A detailed list of the appearances of the Death Star in *A New Hope* and *Return of the Jedi* can be found in the longer version of this chapter: Wolf, "Adapting the Death Star into LEGO."

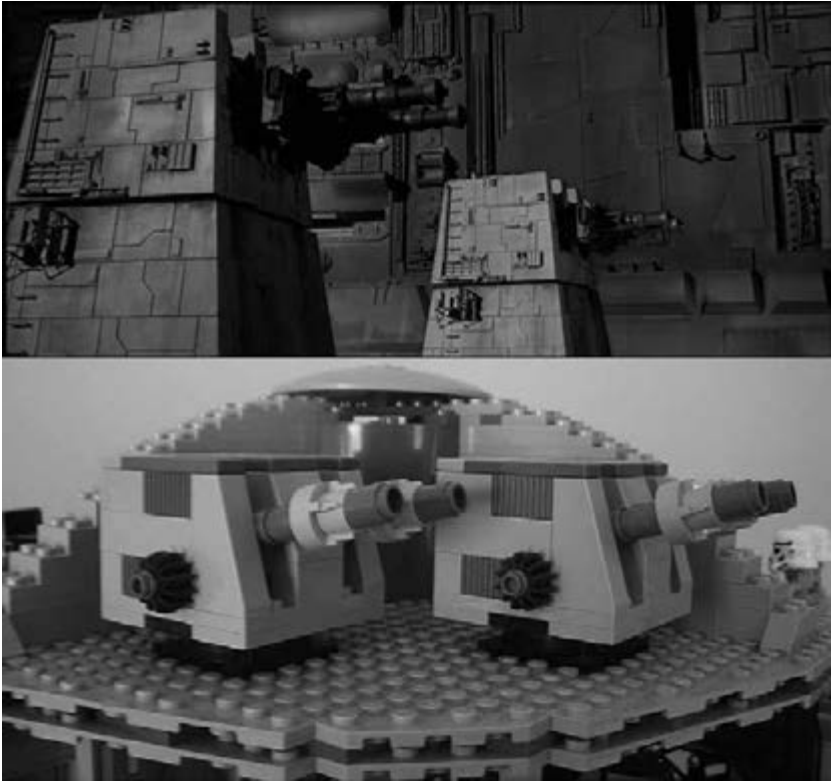


Fig. 11.4: Comparisons of the gun towers on the Death Star's exterior; in the film (top) and in set #10188 (bottom)

Bay 327 Control Room. Both areas are present in set #10188, and one overlooks the other as well. The third most-appearing interior location, the Imperial Conference Room (4:39), is present in set #10188, as is the fourth, the Overbridge Control Room (2:16; includes 18 seconds of close-ups of its viewscreen, which is represented in the set by a double-side piece depicting the unexploded Alderaan on one side and the approach to Yavin 4 on the other). The Overbridge is also located directly above the superlaser crater in the set, even though the spatial relationship between the two is only indicated in sources outside of the film.<sup>15</sup> The next two locations, the Chasm that Luke swings over with Leia (1:17) and the Tractor Beam Controls (1:16),

15 It can be found elsewhere, as discussed in *Star Wars: Death Star Technical Companion* (New York: West End Games, 1991) and "Overbridge," *Wookieepedia*, accessed May 15, 2017, <http://starwars.wikia.com/wiki/Overbridge>.



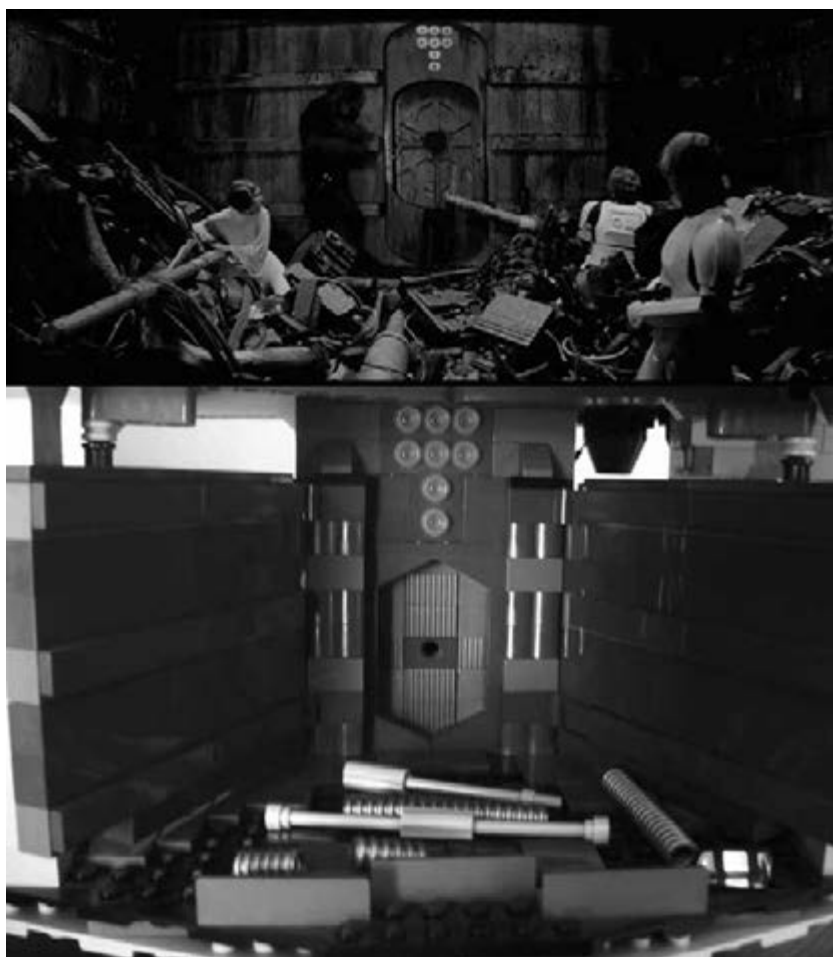


Fig. 11.5: Comparisons of the garbage compactor interior; in the film (top) and in set #10188 (bottom)

are also represented in set #10188, as are the Superlaser Fire Control room<sup>16</sup> (0:21), the Elevator interior (0:12), and Laser Cannon Bay (0:06). Death Star locations not represented by the set include the Elevator balcony by the air shaft where characters wait for the elevator (0:35), the stormtrooper room

<sup>16</sup> The Superlaser Fire Control Room is perhaps the most questionable representation, however; although the superlaser of set #10188 does have control panels on its swiveling base, they differ somewhat from those seen in the film. The film, however, depicts the control room as mainly as banks of lights and switches, with little other detail.

and TIE fighter bay that Han Solo almost runs into (0:02), the TIE Docking Bay that Darth Vader's TIE fighter and two other are seen leaving (0:02), and the Particle Accelerator Tube used when the superlaser fires (0:02). Finally, there are shots of various Death Star hallways (5:53), which could be represented by the lowest level of set #10188, but are little more than passageways. If this is allowed, then out of the 40:37 of Death Star interiors onscreen, only 41 seconds' worth is not represented; which means that set #10188 enables 98.31% of the interior scenes to be reenacted with the playset's locations.<sup>17</sup>

Set #10188 also contains the Emperor's Throne Room from *Return of the Jedi*, and the characters necessary for the film's climactic scene. The second Death Star has less screen time than the first one (28:01, which is 20.8% of *Return of the Jedi*'s running time, according to the 2006 DVD release), even though *Return of the Jedi* is longer than *A New Hope*. Of that time, interiors have far more screen time (23:43) than do exterior shots (4:18), while the second Death Star has a number of locations similar to the first (a Superlaser Fire Control Room, an Overbridge, docking bays, hallways, and so forth), and the new location, the Emperor's Throne Room, is where most of the interior scenes are set (15:16 of the 23:43). The Throne Room in set #10188 has everything needed for the film's climactic scenes: the raised dais with the throne by the window, the collapsing walkway for the fight scene, and the walkway with railings that overlooks the chasm into which the Emperor is thrown (this chasm connects with the one below it that Luke swings across). Most of these locations also contain moveable elements, like doors that open and close, elevators that can be moved from one level to another, guns that can be repositioned, and so on. The tractor beam can be turned off and the walls of the garbage compactor can be made to close inward. In the docking bay, Darth Vader's TIE fighter hangs ready to be used, and is large enough to seat the Darth Vader minifigure inside.

As stated earlier, the LEGO versions are like caricatures of the film's locations, simplifying them and exaggerating their salient features. Design elements from the overall architectural style and color palette to such things as the shapes of light fixtures, windows, doorways, and control panels all evoke a feeling similar to the original, yet their disproportionate sizes give them greater emphasis and make the viewer more aware of the style that they represent and embody (see figure 11.6). After examining set #10188, one becomes more conscious of these elements in the films, despite the

17 Of course, some scenes would require the *Millennium Falcon* to be present in the docking bay, but none is provided, since a scale one would be too small for the minifigures to enter.





Fig. 11.6: Comparisons of the Detention Block area, in the film (left, top and bottom) and set #10188 (right)

fact that they mainly occur in the background. The design also has a way of compartmentalizing the film's action, even though, as mentioned earlier, a number of locations are adjacent just as they are in the film (for example, Leia's cell connects to the Detention Block corridor, which is also above the garbage compactor).

Aside from active play, the set is also designed to reenact film scenes through the staging of vignettes, as is shown on the set's box. That this is encouraged seems evident due to the inclusion of multiple minifigures representing the same character; for example, the three representing Luke Skywalker in his original desert garb, in a stormtrooper uniform, and in black clothing as a Jedi (along with one black hand, representing the black-gloved mechanical hand he has in *Return of the Jedi*). Thus, the set is designed to be put on display (like set #10143) by adults (originally priced at \$400, it is hard to insist that the set was intended only for children). At the same time, however, the dollhouse-like nature of the levels of open-walled rooms encourages, or at the very least allows, a dollhouse approach to play. When two of my sons (then aged 8 and 9) were playing with the set with two girls from the neighborhood, I happened to overhear their play, in which the Death Star was a home where Luke and Leia had bedrooms and referred to Darth Vader as "Daddy"; thus the children used the familial relationships that the film's characters already had, along with the dollhouse design of the set, to create domestic play scenes that blended Star Wars with family dollhouse play. Set #10188, then, appears to have been designed with a number of potential uses in mind.

The adaptation of the Death Star into LEGO, then, successfully combines a display model with a playset, just as LEGO itself combines building sets with playsets, and combines the two Death Stars of *A New Hope* and *The*

*Return of the Jedi* into one set. It represents the films' locations while also changing them, offering greater interactivity than a video game while at the same time changing the way one sees the film locations, emphasizing their production design as well as caricaturing it. The set exhibits an intriguing balance between compactness and economy of the design and the level of detail and recognizability of the film sets' salient features, resulting in a model that can be admired by young and old alike, allowing the set to interest an audience that includes children and adults, and spans multiple generations. A transgenerational audience is something that both LEGO and Star Wars were both able to attain on their own, and this is strengthened even further by their combination, as demonstrated by the clever way in which the Death Star has been adapted in LEGO set #10188.



## 12. Invoking the Holy Trilogy

### Star Wars in the Askewniverse

*Andrew M. Butler*

In Kevin Smith's *Clerks. (The Comic Book)* (1998), Randal Graves observes to his lifelong friend Dante Hicks that “*Star Wars* is probably the biggest thing that ever *did* or ever *will* happen to *our* generation.”<sup>1</sup> Smith asserts that his age group had “a childhood affair with three movies that were the cinematic equivalent of a prepubescent first marriage.”<sup>2</sup> *Star Wars* fed into Smith's personal values, identity, and creative output: “a de rigueur *Star Wars* conversational dissection or homage became one of the leitmotifs of View Askew's body of work.”<sup>3</sup> The first dozen years of Smith's directorial output are dominated by six interconnected films—*Clerks* (1994), *Mallrats* (1995), *Chasing Amy* (1997), *Dogma* (1997), *Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back* (2001), and *Clerks II* (2006)—that constitute the transmedia franchise of the View Askewniverse or Askewniverse, after Smith's production company. In addition, the franchise includes *Clerks: The Animated Series* (2000) and a number of comic books, in particular *Clerks. (The Comic Book)*. The many references to *Star Wars* act both as a means of defining Askewniverse characters' self-identities through their consumption of popular culture and as a form of advertising—unpaid labor for Lucasfilm. I will examine the nature of this labor within the Askewniverse as it depicts twenty-somethings in a variety of ways earning a living within late capitalism.

In Marxian terms, identity is derived from the individual's relation to the economic base of a society, including the manner of labor exchange for wages. But labor can take a number of different forms—productive, intellectual, spectatorial, and so on. Laborers sell labor to produce articles with use-value that may be exploited by capitalists to produce capital derived from exchange-value. In Marx's own words, capitalists “appropriate the produce of the labour of others by alienating [*entfremden*] the produce of

1 *Clerks. (The Comic Book)*, written by Kevin Smith, drawn by Jim Mafhood, and lettered by Sean Konot (Portland, OR: Oni Press, 1998), 12.

2 Kevin Smith, “Married to the Force,” in *A Galaxy Not So Far Away: Writers and Artists on Twenty-Five Years of Star Wars*, ed. Glenn Kenny (New York: Henry Holt, 2002), 72.

3 Smith, “Married,” 72. View Askew Productions is the name of Kevin Smith's production company, which produced the Askewniverse films. His other feature films, television, podcasts, and comic work are beyond the scope of this chapter.

their own.”<sup>4</sup> For example, a father might labor to provide shelter, food, and clothing for his family, as well as consumer goods and entertainment, some of which contribute to an ideological state that Marx describes as false consciousness. Wages provide the laborer with the possibility to consume something like Star Wars, but, at the same time, this particular act of consumption turns them into “laborer-watchers.”

For the worker, a day only partly consists of sleeping and working, with the rest of it used in a number of different ways, including eating, consumption, and leisure. Dallas Smythe argues that “[o]f the off-the-job work time, the largest single block is time of the audiences which is sold to advertisers.”<sup>5</sup> The audience consumes media such as films, sitcoms, or sports coverage, but this also subjects them to advertisements. Audiences as laborer-watchers are sold to advertisers of branded goods. In watching a Star Wars movie, the audience views commercials and trailers, and is interpolated into a transmedia franchise of sequels, prequels, and merchandising.

Building on Smythe’s work, Sut Jhally and Bill Levant argue that the history of twentieth-century television is one of an increasing blur between programs and commercials, “converting program into ad [...] converting consumption watching-time into labor watching-time.”<sup>6</sup> While the Star Wars films themselves would normally not include advertisements, the merchandising of characters and vehicles effectively transforms the films into ads, just as the toys become commercials for the films. The laborer-watcher is alienated and commodified, even as play creates forms of cultural or social capital. M.J. Clarke argues that “the more we live in branded worlds, the more we must learn how people can express themselves in and through brands.”<sup>7</sup> As *Clerks*’s comic-book version of Randal asserts, “if there’s an angle by which we can *profit* from ‘*the Force*’ in our little corner of the world, then why *don’t* we?”<sup>8</sup> Randal is aware of the capitalism underlying the Star Wars franchise and the way in which he has been constructed as consumer and laborer-watcher. By intervening in the sale of merchandising, Randal hopes to enrich himself economically and perhaps increase his agency, especially if it comes with the social capital attached to rare toys.

4 Karl Marx, *Capital Volume One*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Pelican, 1976), 203.

5 Dallas Smythe, “Communications: Blindspot of Western Marxism,” *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory* 1, no. 3 (1977): 2.

6 Sut Jhally and Bill Levant, “Watching as Working: The Valorization of Audience Consciousness,” *Journal of Communication* 36, no. 3 (1986): 141.

7 M.J. Clarke, “Branded Worlds and Contracting Galaxies: The Case of Star Wars Galaxies,” *Games and Culture* 9, no. 3 (2014): 205.

8 *Clerks*. (*The Comic Book*), 12.

Another unifying factor in the Askewniverse is the presence of two drug dealers: the sex-obsessed and foul-mouthed Jay and the appropriately named Silent Bob. On at least two occasions, Silent Bob quotes Yoda from *The Empire Strikes Back*—"Adventure. Excitement. A Jedi craves not these things" (*Mallrats*) and "Do. Or do not. There is no try" (*Chasing Amy*)—as well as trying to use the Force to levitate a cigarette and then a videocassette at various points in *Mallrats*. In *Dogma*, the only Star Wars reference comes when Bethany recruits them to her mission and Jay observes to Bob: "I feel like I'm Han Solo, and you're Chewie, and she's Ben Kenobi, and we're in that fucked up bar." As ancillary characters, Jay and Silent Bob perform a kind of Greek chorus throughout the films, while also offering parallels to the uninhibited Randal and repressed Dante (*Clerks*, *Comic Book*, *Animated Series*, *Clerks II*), Brodie Bruce and T.S. Quint (*Mallrats*), and Banky Edwards and Holden McNeill (*Chasing Amy*, *Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back*). Smith recalls a French critic at Cannes asking if "'The foul-mouth an' ze fat man outside ze shop [...] are zey the Artoo De-too an' See-Threepio of zis strange universe you 'ave created?'"<sup>9</sup>

Alongside their appropriation of the street as a market space, Jay and Silent Bob are also laborer-watchers. The Star Wars media franchise that they labor through was itself the product of a failure to gain the rights to an intellectual property: George Lucas had wanted to adapt Flash Gordon. Instead, he laminated Joseph Campbell's monomyth onto space opera, while drawing upon other genres such as Saturday chapter serials, the Western, and the war movie, as well as specific influential texts, including *The Hidden Fortress* (1958), *The Wizard of Oz* (1939), and *The Lord of the Rings* (1949-1950). In the decade after *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), much science-fiction film had been dystopian rather than escapist; for example, Lucas's own *THX-1138* (1971), *Soylent Green* (1973), and *Zardoz* (1974). *A New Hope* offered a more optimistic spectacle during a period of American stagflation and disillusionment. Luke Skywalker was an unambiguous hero in an antiheroic era, recuperating the American Dream after the Bicentennial, while rewriting military history; whatever Lucas's personal politics, the trilogy anticipated the neoconservatism of Ronald Reagan, which reached its zenith in the Strategic Defense Initiative (colloquially known as Star Wars).

Robin Wood labels the trilogy's ideology Reaganite, arguing that it reassures audiences about the dangers of fascism and the atom bomb by

9 Smith, "Married," 71. It might be problematic pushing the parallel too far—C-3PO is sensible but far from silent.

saying “don’t worry, Uncle George [...] will take you by the hand and lead you through Wonderland [...] never fear, he’ll also see you safely home.”<sup>10</sup> The audience willingly becomes childlike again, lulled by the Wonderland of special effects. The patriarch is reinstated as authoritative figure whose role must be inherited by the son; Luke must follow the example of the “good father” Obi-Wan and repudiate the attitudes of the “bad father” Darth Vader. Then, once Vader is revealed to be Luke’s biological father Anakin, the narrative arc of the holy trilogy becomes the redemption of the father; the prequel trilogy thus constitutes the narrative of the good father’s temporary fall.

As I have already noted, parents usually support their children economically, with pre-teen viewers the perfect age to watch the Star Wars films. Whether merchandising is a present or bought with pocket money, it is a gift from parents, as Smith’s first Star Wars toys were. Smith had seen the Kenner Star Wars Early Bird set toys even before his first viewing of *A New Hope* at around age seven.<sup>11</sup> He financed the semi-autobiographical *Clerks*, set in a convenience store and the neighboring video rental store, by selling his comics collection, maxing out credit cards, and repurposing his college fund. But while his characters constantly reference Star Wars and other popular texts, Smith’s debut is aesthetically closer to films by Spike Lee, Jim Jarmusch, and Richard Linklater than to the blockbusters his characters obsess over. Smith’s oeuvre is characterized by meandering, talky vignettes, echoing the more non-linear career path Generation Xers experienced in contrast to their Baby Boomer parents’ linear career trajectories.

In a 1990 *Time* magazine article, David M. Gross and Sophronia Scott noted that Generation Xers “have trouble making decisions. They would rather hike in the Himalayas than climb a corporate ladder. [...] They crave entertainment, but their attention span is as short as one zap of a TV dial. [...] They postpone marriage because they dread divorce.” The restricted geography of *Clerks* echoes this sense of entrappedness—in dead-end McJobs, ambivalent about college, stuck living with parents—and offers a late-capitalist equivalent to Luke at the start of *A New Hope*. Dante is alienated, stuck selling groceries. The immaterial labor of clerks such as Dante is located within the shop, a location for “the realisation of profit, [...] the designed stage for marketing commodities, as the form that aggregates

10 Robin Wood, *Hollywood from Vietnam to Reagan* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 165-166.

11 *A New Hope* was released May 25, 1977. Smith’s memory of seeing the Kenner Star Wars Early Bird Set is in June 1977 (Smith, “Married,” 73).

specific products, coordinates logistics and distribution, and that organises access to commodities within the built environment."<sup>12</sup> This increasingly invisible form of labor is productive of surplus value, but not of material objects.

Dante and Randal attempt to make life bearable via their shared cultural knowledge of Star Wars, for example, having conversations about which is the better film: *Return of the Jedi* or *The Empire Strikes Back*. As Dante claims,

*Empire* had the better ending: Luke gets his hand cut off, and finds out Vader's his father; Han gets frozen and taken away by Boba Fett. It ends on such a down note. And that's life—a series of down endings. All *Jedi* had was a bunch of Muppets.

The two friends also have an ethical discussion about what happened to the workers on the Death Star.<sup>13</sup> Personnel in the one destroyed by Luke in *A New Hope* were part of the Empire and thus culpable, Dante argues, but the one destroyed by Lando Calrissian in *Return of the Jedi* would have been occupied by construction workers. Randal is bothered by "All those innocent contractors hired to do a job [who] were killed—casualties of a war they had nothing to do with." A construction worker who overhears their debate at the Quick Stop interrupts to correct them, recalling a job for a gangster that he had turned down: "You know, any contractor willing to work on that Death Star knew the risks. If they were killed, it was their own fault. A roofer listens to this ... [taps his heart] not his wallet." The Death Star thereby becomes "a way of imagining the totality that surrounds them,"<sup>14</sup> which is to say the capitalist system. Whilst the worker has little choice but to labor, there is clearly an ethics of where and for whom to labor.

The Death Star is also referenced in *Mallrats*, Smith's second feature in which the two central characters, T.S. Quint and Brodie Bruce, are trying to reunite with their respective ex-girlfriends. T.S.'s former girlfriend, Brandi Svenning, is about to be auctioned off by her father in a dating game show being filmed at the mall. Brodie believes they can sabotage the game show

12 Bridget Kenny, "Retail, the Service Worker and the Polity: Attaching Labour and Consumption," *Critical Arts* 29, no. 2 (2015): 200.

13 The published script has a longer speech, suggesting that the Empire is a theocracy and the Emperor is a religious leader: "he's like the pope for the dark side of the Force. He's a holy man; a shaman, kind of, albeit an evil one." Dante says of the rebels, who fail to mention any religious beliefs, "I think they were Catholics."

14 Darren Jorgensen, "Death Star, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love Globalization," *symploke* 15, nos. 1-2 (2007): 211.



and he enlists Jay and Silent Bob's help. Jay claims, "We were gonna do that anyway. [...] Silent Bob stole the schematic of the stage from some foolish carpenter and found a weakness, just like the fucking Death Star." Brodie's own ex-girlfriend has meanwhile started dating Shannon Hamilton, a clerk at the Fashionable Male store who specializes in seducing women on the rebound.

The mall actively encourages processes of consumption, directing "the stroller to their windows and their wants; they become new social spaces, facilitating intimacies."<sup>15</sup> The individual is thereby automatically transformed into a buyer within the flow of capital. Hamilton has no tolerance for those who refuse to consume—the mallrats. They engage in what Mike Presdee calls "proletarian shopping,"<sup>16</sup> a term he uses to describe the actions of unemployed youths who occupy mall spaces but do not make purchases. Indeed, John Fiske argues that such "youths consumed images and space instead of commodities, a kind of sensuous consumption that did not create profits."<sup>17</sup> Despite Quint and Brodie's lack of a "shopping agenda," the heterosexual couplings of the narrative lead to Quint's wedding at the Universal Studios *Jaws* ride and Brodie presenting *The Tonight Show*, tying them both back to practices of media consumption.

Smith's third feature, *Chasing Amy*, includes a racial critique of the Star Wars trilogy by the first named African-American character to appear in the Asknewniverse films. At a comics convention, Hooper X<sup>18</sup> parodies black nationalist and particularly Nation of Islam rhetoric, shouting: "Always some white boy gotta invoke the holy trilogy. Bust this: those movies are about how the white man keeps the brother down, even in a galaxy far, far away." Blond, blue-eyed, heroic Luke is an Aryan figure, whereas Darth Vader is "the blackest brother in the galaxy, Nubian god." Of course, this is partially true: Vader is voiced by James Earl Jones, the only black actor in *A New Hope*, but his body is that of the white English bodybuilder David Prowse and, in *Return of the Jedi*, Sebastian Shaw is substituted for the reveal of Vader's face. *A New Hope*'s racial diversity is only supplied by alien species, offering "exotic beings [as] symbolically proxy for blacks and other people

15 Kenny, "Retail," 200.

16 Mike Presdee, *Agony or Ecstasy: Broken Transitions and the New Social State of Working-Class Youth in Australia* (Magill: South Australian Centre for Youth Studies, 1986), 16.

17 John Fiske, *Reading the Popular* (London: Routledge, 1989), 17.

18 The character may be inspired by Eric Griffin and Nabile P. Hage of the association ANIA, which brought together four black comic book publishers in 1993 to boost African-American readership and to compete with DC and Marvel's attempts at diversity.

of color.”<sup>19</sup> Kevin J. Wetmore Jr. defends the film against Smith/X’s charge of whites versus an evil black man by pointing out that the stormtroopers take their “name from the Nazis, and the members of the Imperial Command [have] uniforms based on the Nazis.”<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, nearly all quasi-human characters remain white.

Hooper also objects to Lando Calrissian, labelling him an “Uncle Tom nigger.” For Hooper and other critics, Calrissian is a token figure, rather than part of a wider social structure. Adilifu Nama notes that, in the context of post-Civil Rights, early Reaganite America, “Working and middle-class whites perceived that their economic well-being was threatened by the potential of black workers being hired or promoted past them because of affirmative action.”<sup>21</sup> Calrissian, despite or because he is a narrative agent substituted for Solo, is always already stigmatized by the racist attitudes of white audiences and therefore must be redeemed (and made ineffectual<sup>22</sup>) by the narrative.

Smith’s critique of Lucas’s shortcomings in representing diversity might be undermined by the revelation that Hooper’s macho black militant attitudes are the performed persona of an effeminate gay man. Of course, Hooper’s two personalities need not be mutually exclusive, but Hooper is a doubly token figure, standing in for all black and male homosexual identities in a film whose plot is about a straight man’s romantic pursuit of a gay woman.<sup>23</sup> Within the context of the film, however, Hooper’s militant identity and publicity stunt is a sales pitch, adding economic value to his comic books. He appears to have appropriated Darth Vader as a symbol of black power inherent to the character’s identity, but *Chasing Amy* is ambiguous as to how seriously we should take Hooper. Hooper’s creative labor in his comic book, *White Hat in’ Coon*, might be a personal expression of his identity, a cynical performance of one to make money, or a mixture of both.

19 Adilifu Nama, “R is for Race, Not Rocket: Black Representation in American Science Fiction Cinema,” *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 26, no. 2 (2009): 159.

20 Kevin Wetmore Jr., *The Empire Triumphant: Race, Religion and Rebellion in the Star Wars Films* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2005), 128.

21 Nama, “R is for Race,” 160.

22 Wetmore Jr., *The Empire Triumphant*, 133. Wetmore argues that he is ineffectual in the rescue of Han in *Return of the Jedi* and indeed needs to be rescued himself by the blind Han.

23 Smith returns to militant black male characters with Rufus in *Dogma* and Chaka Luther-King in *Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back*, both played by and drawing on the comic persona of Chris Rock.

Smith's evident interest in comic books gave him both an ambition to write in the medium and the opportunity to do so once he was an established figure. After writing about Jay and Silent Bob and their superhero alter egos Bluntman and Chronic in issues of *Oni Double Feature*, Smith wrote the one-shot *Clerks. (The Comic Book)*. The *Clerks* comic dramatizes the economics of Star Wars collectibles, focusing on characters who buy increasingly specific toys: Handless Luke, Cremated Anakin Skywalker, Shriekin' Luke Skywalker, and so on. Randal spies an opportunity to make money by buying the in-demand toys to resell at a premium. Dante is surprised that the manufacturer has not increased production to satisfy demand, which Randal dismisses as "commie talk," as that would undermine the freedom of the secondary market. Merchandising is explicitly compared to "the billion dollar drug and sex markets"; all three appear to be satisfying needs that the market does not fully gratify. The supplier controls when the purchase can be made—with only limited numbers made available—just as a dealer controls the selling of drugs.

In the comic, Randal and Dante go in search of a supplier, Lord Howell, who provides them with examples of Wave Sixty-Nine toys (with obvious sexual connotations). Their foray into the free market is stopped by Jay and Silent Bob, who recognize that only a limited amount of disposable income is spent on merchandising rather than weed and pills. Understanding the power of supply and demand, Jay and Silent Bob hijack a truck carrying Wave Seventy merchandising and flood the market with loss-leading toys, driving other dealers out of business. Jay and Silent Bob then return to dealing. This exaggerated comparison between merchandising and drugs may suggest a negative view of collecting. But on the other hand, Askewniverse films take a neutral-to-positive view of drugs: in this world, there are no overdoses or addicts. The characters in the comic may be cynical about Star Wars's attempts to build surplus value through new versions and formats, but the comic is itself an example of merchandising designed to attract viewers of the films and to deliver an audience to those movies. In an early interview with film producer John Pierson before the release of *Mallrats*, Smith said, "What am I gonna do? Put Silent Bob on a shirt?"<sup>24</sup> Within a few years, however, Smith did indeed have his own line of merchandising, clothing, toys, posters, and more. His Askewniverse materials precisely mimic Lucasfilm's attempts to brand its audience—to make a permanent mark of identity upon them and to deliver a lucrative cohort of laborer-watchers.

24 John Pierson, *Spike, Mike, Slackers and Dykes: A Guided Tour Across a Decade of American Independent Cinema* (New York: Hyperion, 1997), 201.

Perhaps Smith's biggest attempt to deliver laborer-watchers came when, with Dave Mandel, he developed *Clerks: The Animated Series*. However, ABC got cold feet about ratings, canceling it after just two episodes. An animated George Lucas appears in the second broadcast episode, "A Dissertation on the American Justice System by People Who Have Never Been Inside a Courtroom, Let Alone Know Anything About the Law, But Have Seen Way Too Many Legal Thrillers" (2000). Randal sues Dante on Jay's behalf and inexplicably calls Lucas as a witness, asking him "do you think *Phantom Menace* is as good a movie as *Empire*?" Having pointed out two contradictions between the original trilogy and the new film, Randal alleges that Lucas "knew this was a bad movie, that you wrote it over a weekend but kept telling people it was done for years." Randal here represents adult disappointment at the new material not matching up to the films they had loved as children and teenagers. He challenges Lucas in a way that many fans, such as those represented by the documentary *The People vs. George Lucas* (2010), would be happy to second.

Blaming "Uncle" George, the once-reassuring father-figure, acknowledges the hierarchy of textual authority from the original holy trilogy down to fan writing, from author as owner through author-for-hire to amateur authorship that is a form of unpaid labor. Will Brooker argues that "George Lucas's involvement is absolutely paramount for a text to be considered genuinely canonical."<sup>25</sup> Therefore, it is Lucas's responsibility if canon disappoints, even if he did not create it. Respect for his authorial status began to unravel following criticism of changes he made to re-releases and special editions of the original trilogy in the late 1990s and early 2000s, as well as the many disappointments of the prequel trilogy. One change considered particularly egregious by fans was the re-editing of the Mos Eisley cantina scene in *A New Hope*, in which Han shoots and kills the bounty hunter Greedo. In the 1997 special edition, Greedo shoots first, undermining the earlier sense of Han's moral ambiguity.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, whilst Lucasfilm is happy about the activities of laborer-watchers in their consumption of merchandising and is dependent upon their advertising, the move to production in terms of fan fiction and subcreation is commonly regarded with a degree of suspicion.<sup>27</sup>

25 Will Brooker, "Internet Fandom and the Continuing Narratives of *Star Wars*, *Blade Runner* and *Alien*," in *Alien Zone II: The Spaces of Science-Fiction Cinema*, ed. Annette Kuhn (London: Verso, 1999), 67.

26 In the 2004 DVD, they shoot in unison.

27 Whilst various products and films have been thought to infringe Lucasfilm's Intellectual Property, the production company co-ran The Official *Star Wars* Fan Film Awards 2002-11 and 2015-2016.

This policing of intellectual property (IP) is at the heart of *Jay and Silent Bob Strike Back*, as Hollywood attempts to make a film featuring Jay and Silent Bob's alter egos, Bluntman and Chronic. *Chasing Amy* had established that McNeill and Edwards pay likeness rights money to the two drug dealers; they wish to protect their identities and wish to control their exploitation. In the course of the film, Smith references a variety of other films and television programs—*The Matrix*, *The Fugitive*, and the Scooby-Doo and Star Wars franchises. Jay and Silent Bob seem unlikely metonyms for the Empire, but the pre-film caption—"A long time ago, at a convenience store not so far away"—is a variant on Star Wars's iconic opening frame. Moreover, the logo of the film copies the stylized rendition of the Star Wars titles.

The film also includes a cameo from Carrie Fisher, who plays a nun. As Leia, Fisher offered a first crush for many of Smith's age and older, as she was initially presented as a self-reliant and resourceful protagonist who later turns out to be Luke's twin. While Fisher rewrote later scripts, the character lost agency through the series. Post-Star Wars, much of her work was in cameos, while she worked as a script doctor and bestselling writer. Playing a nun, she exhibits a fetishizable chastity, with Jay's rejected cunnilingus taboo. Mark Hamill is cast (as himself) playing the role of Cockknocker, the villain of the comic and film *Bluntman and Chronic*. An onscreen caption "HEY KIDS! IT'S MARK HAMILL! [APPLAUSE!]" prods us to recognize him, in one of several fourth-wall-breaking moments in the film. There follows a parody of lightsaber fights, albeit with bong, and Jedi-style acrobatics, with Jay calling himself Darth Balls and wielding a double-piped bong in reference to Darth Maul in *The Phantom Menace*. Hamill, *soi-disant* Jedi master, loses a hand with the exasperated aside to camera, "Not again."

The director of the film-within-the film, Chaka Luther-King, suggests that Lucas might sue. Lucasfilm is happy with laborer-watchers to the extent that such work delivers capital to them or to create a personal identity, but it does not wish them to make capital of their own from poached IP. There is a narrow line being trod. Randal had sought to profit from the Force but was unable to because of Jay and Silent Bob, who now stand to make money from their own IP as well as their drugs.

These likeness rights provide a kind of *deus ex machina* for Dante and Randal in the final Askewniverse film to date. *Clerks II* opens with them in their old jobs—although they lose them right away as Randal burns the premises down. They move from being wage slaves for a family business to slinging hash for a major fast-food franchise. But Dante has an escape plan: he can move to Florida with his girlfriend Emma, where her father will give him a house and a car wash to run. This is perhaps a step up from

working for someone else, but Dante has benefited from nepotism rather than succeeding on the merits of hard work.

The sharing of cultural capital continues to distract them from their exploitation, even if the sources are in flux. At the time, Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy seemed to be eclipsing Star Wars as a pop-cultural phenomenon. Randal might insist, "there's only one 'Return,' okay, and it ain't of the King,' it's 'of the Jedi,'" but a generation of viewers born after *Return of the Jedi* needed more convincing. The dismissal of Jar Jar Binks and the performances of the actors playing Anakin ("Manikin Skywalker") by Randal's coworkers and customers strike a nerve. Former high school acquaintance Lance Dowds, now an internet millionaire, sneeringly suggests that they are still arguing over whether Han or Greedo shot first.

The engaged Dante continues to postpone marriage to Emma—having been in a relationship with Veronica at the end of *Clerks*—by getting his branch manager Becky pregnant. His dream is to marry Becky and maintain his three-decades-plus friendship with Randal by returning to work at the Quick Stop. This requires capital, which Jay and Silent Bob lend him, thanks to the aforementioned likeness rights monies. Dante returns to where he started, but now working for himself, and will most likely end up exploiting others. Thus, the overall story arc of the Askewniverse takes a Generation X slacker from a McJob to being a business owner and father. At the same time, Smith constantly drew upon Star Wars as part of his intertextual referencing. While he could appear critical of "Uncle George" or "George Toyboy Lucas" as he moved from consumer to prosumer to producer, parody still allowed parasitism of others' IP, especially Lucas's, in the production of his own transmedia storyworld.

Wood argues that, in the original Star Wars trilogy,

The Father must here be understood in all senses, symbolic, literal, potential [...] [including] the young heterosexual male, father of the future, whose eventual union with the "good woman" has always formed the archetypal happy ending of the American film, guarantee of the perpetuation of the nuclear family and social stability."<sup>28</sup>

After a dozen years, Dante becomes that young heterosexual male, while Becky becomes that good woman; in *Clerks II*, Dante finally becomes the patriarchal capitalist.

28 Wood, *Hollywood*, 172.

It may be that Star Wars's cultural capital distracts from the wider economic picture. Dante even admits:

I'd hardly call *Star Wars* the *biggest* thing to happen to our generation. It's a movie that—granted—the flannel-wearing set of our generation seem to obsess over ... present company especially ... but it's still *just* a movie. Trust me, after the over-exposure of the re-release, no one but you gives a rat's ass about your precious trilogy anymore.<sup>29</sup>

And yet, the box office success of the prequels and the Disney-era *The Force Awakens* and *Rogue One* might contradict this. The branding continues and Smith clearly remains a Lucas fan. In his shifts between self-financing, studio funding, and work-for-hire, Smith's auteurist signature, his own IP, is evidently made in part through his own laborer-watching of Lucas's franchise.

29 *Clerks*. (*The Comic Book*), 12.

## 13. Chasing Wild Space

Narrative Outsides and World-Building Frontiers in *Knights of the Old Republic* and *The Old Republic*

Cody Mejeur

As introduced in the iconic line that precedes the first film's opening crawl, Star Wars's galaxy far, far away is the foundation for the franchise's world-building efforts. It is the backdrop and context for the story told by any Star Wars film, novel, game, or other text,<sup>1</sup> and as such it functions as a narrative world or storyworld. David Herman describes a storyworld as the "mental model" of the larger world of a text, one that audiences construct from "textual cues and the inferences that they make possible."<sup>2</sup> In other words, the Star Wars galaxy is only partially represented by any particular text, and audiences use that partial representation to imagine how the rest of the galaxy works. However, it seems strange to call the Star Wars galaxy, itself an agglomeration of inconsistent and contested narratives, characters, and worlds, a singular storyworld. Marie-Laure Ryan's recent conception of the narrative universe as an accumulation of storyworlds seems more apt.<sup>3</sup> This chapter therefore explores the space of the Star Wars galaxy as a narrative universe, arguing that it renews itself and its transmedial franchise through the mystery of outside spaces. The use of these outside spaces in Star Wars suggests a new modification or addition to existing theories of narrative world-building, and draws critical attention to the ethical and political dimensions of world-building processes.

A narrative universe relies on the creation of narrative space, including a dynamic process of expanding and exploring that space. Jan-Noël Thon explains this as the difference between the "represented space" and the "space of representation," where represented space is what the audience directly encounters and the space of representation is the larger space not

1 While obviously lacking medium-specificity, the term "text" provides a useful shorthand for the narrative objects that contribute to Star Wars's narrative universe. I use the term "audiences" for the receivers of texts in different media for the same reason.

2 David Herman, *Story Logic: Problems and Possibilities of Narrative* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 1, 6.

3 Marie-Laure Ryan, "Story/Worlds/Media: Tuning the Instruments of a Media-Conscious Narratology," in *Storyworlds across Media: Toward a Media-Conscious Narratology*, ed. Marie-Laure Ryan and Jan-Noël Thon (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2014).



encountered, but indicated or inferred.<sup>4</sup> Represented space is constantly expanding through new stories that expose audiences to new content, leading them to continually revise their understanding of the narrative universe.<sup>5</sup> In the case of Star Wars, the represented space of the galaxy is a host of familiar planets and characters that audiences have encountered through the franchise's various media texts. Each new franchise entry has expanded this by introducing new places and characters that add to the main story of the franchise, suggesting in the process that there is always more for writers and audiences to imagine and explore. Matt Hills calls this type of storyworld *hyperdiegesis*, "the creation of a vast and detailed narrative space, only a fraction of which is ever directly seen or encountered within the text, but which nevertheless appears to operate according to principles of internal logic and extension."<sup>6</sup> Hills's emphasis on an "internal logic" here is significant: hyperdiegesis operates by establishing a larger space that presumably operates by the same or similar rules to the represented space.

Yet, there are also narrative spaces outside the galaxy—spaces mentioned or hinted at in various texts, whose content is unknown to the characters and not (yet) revealed to audiences. Star Wars maps, especially those of the video games, illustrate this point most vividly. For example, the map from the MMORPG *The Old Republic (TOR)* displays the available regions of the galaxy that the player can visit. At the far left of the map is a region called Wild Space, which lies beyond the border of the main galaxy and appears to have few stars and planets. Wild Space is a recent addition to the game's map and was unavailable and unmarked prior to the *Knights of the Fallen Empire (Fallen Empire)* expansion (2015).

*TOR*'s galactic map structures the game's representation of its narrative universe. It is an example of what Marie-Laure Ryan calls "maps of narrative space," as well as an "intradiegetic map," a map that exists as an object in its storyworld.<sup>7</sup> Crucially, this intradiegetic map affects the internal logic of the storyworld by dividing it into different territories. As Ryan explains, the boundaries of a map "structure storyworlds into differentiated zones obeying different rules," and they "forbid crossing, but they are generally

4 Jan-Noël Thon, *Transmedial Narratology and Contemporary Media Culture* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 47.

5 Thon, *Transmedial Narratology*, 62.

6 Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 137.

7 Marie-Laure Ryan, et al., *Narrating Space / Spatializing Narrative: Where Narrative Theory and Geography Meet* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio State University Press, 2016).

not impermeable enough to prevent violations.”<sup>8</sup> Within the boundaries of the galactic map, the lines delimit regions that operate by their own rules—they are controlled by different factions, contain different species, and present different challenges to the player. Outside of these boundaries are other spaces where these rules may not apply, and this is especially true of the spaces beyond the borders of the galaxy.

The drawing of a map is an act of inscription, the placing of boundary lines that distinguish between inside and outside. The space outside the line defines the inside, because the line creates an oppositional distinction; in other words, defining where a region is as opposed to where it is not. Caroline Levine identifies this in her reading of Derrida’s conception of narrative form: “Derrida shows how there can be no belonging—no inside—without a ‘constitutive outside.’”<sup>9</sup> In this sense, the mapping of a storyworld or narrative universe always creates and relies on outside spaces where the established rules (the internal logic) either do not exist or operate differently. As Ryan suggests, these boundaries are not completely impermeable, and can be violated in order to expand and transform a narrative universe like the Star Wars galaxy. Wild Space, as we shall see shortly, does just this.

In *TOR*, the galaxy is both narrative space and play space, meaning that its boundaries define both the narrative universe and where the player can go within it. Johan Huizinga famously describes this as the Magic Circle: “All play moves and has its being within a play-ground marked off beforehand either materially or ideally, deliberately or as a matter of course.”<sup>10</sup> Recent scholarship has posited that the Magic Circle is porous, particularly in how players and communities move across its borders, but the in-game boundaries of the play space are almost completely impenetrable for the player, who can only select areas within the boundaries of the map, and in visiting those areas can only play in the provided space.<sup>11</sup> In this sense, Wild Space and other territories beyond the boundaries of

8 Ryan, et al., *Narrating Space / Spatializing Narrative*, 36.

9 Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), 26.

10 Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 2009), 10.

11 There are rare but possible exceptions to this with bugs, glitches, cheats, or modifications of the game that allow the player to reach areas that should be inaccessible. However, these are not the usual or intended player experience.

the game map are literally out of bounds and outside of play before they are introduced.<sup>12</sup>

Drawing these points together, outside spaces are represented beyond the borders of maps that delineate the galaxy. The mystery of such spaces lasts until they are later brought into the narrative universe, when it becomes clear which aspects of the galaxy's internal logic do or do not apply. I call this process the hyperdiegetic cycle, drawing on Hills's concept of hyperdiegesis mentioned earlier. The hyperdiegetic cycle renews the narrative universe by introducing new elements to its internal logic, transforming an outside space into an inside one by gradually making it identifiable and familiar. This cycle operates in two directions: the first, internally oriented, fills in narrative space that follows the narrative universe's internal logic, and the second, externally oriented, introduces outside spaces that transcend the narrative universe's logic. Hills hints at the latter type in his later revisiting of the hyperdiegesis when he suggests that familiar conventions of series are occasionally punctured by moments of temporary "disruption."<sup>13</sup> I argue, however, that outside spaces are more than this: their disruption is lasting because their content is woven into the narrative universe's internal logic, forever changing the sense of what is familiar and conventional. Game expansions illustrate this: the introduction of the Empire of Zakuul in *Fallen Empire* fundamentally altered the narrative universe with a new, all-powerful threat, and changed gameplay with new mechanics and game modes.

The hyperdiegetic cycle constantly relies on this use of outside spaces as a frontier: a place of unknown and unexpected possibilities where the narrative universe is renewed and transformed through confrontation. The hyperdiegetic cycle thus draws on the foundational frontier myth in American popular culture, posited by Richard Slotkin in his seminal work *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier*. Slotkin argues that the frontier exists on the boundary between civilization and the wilderness beyond, and that, throughout America's history, the nation and its subjects were reborn through frontier violence. As Slotkin explains, "The first colonists saw in America an opportunity to regenerate their fortunes, their spirits, and the power of the church and nation; but

12 Game expansions often demonstrate this process by adding new spaces that were previously outside of play and unknown to characters and players (examples include *Fallen Empire* in *TOR*, *Mists of Pandaria* in *World of Warcraft*, etc.).

13 Matt Hills, "Defining Cult TV: Texts, Inter-Texts and Fan Audiences," in *The Television Studies Reader*, ed. Robert C. Allen and Annette Hill (New York: Routledge, 2004), 512.

the means to that regeneration ultimately became the means of violence, and the myth of regeneration through violence became the structuring metaphor of the American experience."<sup>14</sup>

Crucially, there is no frontier without a notion of spaces outside of civilization: spaces that are different and threatening, that must be tamed and brought to order. The process of converting wild outside spaces into controlled inside ones is inherently violent, changing everyone and everything involved. The individuals who travel to the frontier are transformed by their experiences there, as they are marked by what they learn from encountering (or conquering) other peoples and places. At the same time, the inhabitants of outside spaces are violently subjugated by the colonizing culture. Finally, the internal logic of the narrative universe, including its peoples, cultures, and politics, are both renewed and altered by the introduction of new elements from outside spaces. While these elements are particularly evident in *Star Wars*, they hold pertinent insights for narrative world-building across transmedial franchises.

The same regeneration through violence that has driven American culture is at work in the frontiers of *Star Wars* and is central to the hyperdiegetic cycle of the franchise.<sup>15</sup> While all of the dark areas beyond the edge of the map are outside spaces and potential frontiers, there are several that the franchise has specifically identified: the Yuuzhan Vong galaxy, the Unknown Regions, and the aforementioned Wild Space. These outside spaces have generated many mysterious, external threats to challenge and renew the galaxy, including the Yuuzhan Vong Empire of the novels and comics, the Killik and Ssi-ruuk of the novels, the Sith Empire and Empire of Zakuul of the *Knights of the Old Republic* (*KotOR*) games, and Grand Admiral Thrawn, most recently portrayed in the *Rebels* television series. Each of these threats forced the galaxy to encounter its various frontiers; together they reveal how outside spaces and frontiers have particular themes, aesthetics, and ethics.

14 Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1860* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 5.

15 This is partially due to the conventions that the franchise draws from other frontier genres, including the presence of Western tropes in *Star Wars*. See William H. Katerberg, *Future West: Utopia and Apocalypse in Frontier Science Fiction* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008) and Carl Abbott, *Imagined Frontiers: Contemporary America and Beyond* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015).

## Wild Space

Similar to the romanticized Wild West in American culture, Wild Space is a frontier filled with unpredictable and unknown possibilities. In *TOR's Fallen Empire* expansion, it appears as a space outside the galaxy that the game's characters know little or nothing about. The expansion's story begins with chasing a threat into the undiscovered "depths of Wild Space" in a desperate bid for answers. The Sith Emperor has destroyed a planet, betrayed his people, and then vanished. Some time after his disappearance, a "mysterious army" from a previously unknown civilization invades the galaxy, conquering everything in its path. The Jedi and the Sith suspect these events are related and enlist the player to help search beyond the edge of the galaxy. They are quickly ambushed by a vast fleet of ships controlled by the unknown civilization, which is soon revealed as the Eternal Empire, Zakuul.

As part of Wild Space, Zakuul exhibits several characteristics common to outside spaces in narrative universes. The first of these is an aesthetic built on the concept of the infinite. This infinite aesthetic, as I label it, presents objects as boundless in number, space, or time, making them seem overwhelming or even divine. Zakuul has many examples of this, including its moniker, the Eternal Empire, its fleet, the Eternal Fleet, and its seat of power, the Eternal Throne. To pick one example, the Eternal Fleet is a virtually endless arrangement of ships, all identical and connected in one sentient network. Beyond its considerable firepower, the Eternal Fleet is visually imposing, seemingly occupying and controlling every space reaching in every direction. It is, in effect, the representation of outside space opposing the player and the galaxy. The infinite aesthetic is tied to the function of outside spaces in the hyperdiegetic cycle. Not bound by the definitions and borders of the main galaxy, outside spaces are theoretically infinite, and could consist of many other worlds, galaxies, or dimensions. They thus provide the narrative universe with an infinite frontier, including infinite threats, salvations, and possible expansions.

A second characteristic of outside spaces is their portrayal as unknown and mysterious places. Zakuul's invasion of the galaxy sets the stage for this perception—no one knows for sure where Zakuul came from or what its motives are. Zakuulian society centers on the Eternal Throne and Emperor Valkorion, an ancient and powerful figure with a hidden agenda. Upon encountering Valkorion, the player character and their companion immediately sense that he is actually the Sith Emperor they are hunting, though his secret control of an unknown empire comes as a complete surprise to

them. As Valkorion later muses to the player: “Emperor of the Sith was my first face, but it is merely one of many I have worn.”<sup>16</sup> Valkorion wears many faces by transferring his consciousness to new bodies, which presents the potential for limitless expansion of his plots and provides limitless material for developers to spin into new stories for players to uncover. In this sense, Valkorion personifies the infinite aesthetic, constituting an infinite narrative frontier for the game similar to how Palpatine and his scheming have provided fodder for many stories related to the main franchise. Valkorion addresses this in his chiding of the player: “Given ten lifetimes, could you unravel all I have wrought?”<sup>17</sup> The unknown contents of Wild Space and the mysterious motivations of its inhabitants thereby provide what Matt Hills calls a “defining narrative enigma or puzzle” that drives the story forward. As long as the enigma remains unsolved, the narrative will continue to circle around it, creating an “endlessly deferred narrative.”<sup>18</sup> Wild Space and Valkorion are only two examples of how outside spaces and their characters can function as enigmas, but they are representative ones.

Outside spaces thus alter the narrative universe and its characters, as is evident in how Wild Space rewrites the identity of the player character. Prior to *Fallen Empire*, the player character has many names and identities determined by the player and the character’s class. A Republic Trooper, for example, has a very different narrative and identity from a Sith Inquisitor. Once encountering the Eternal Empire, however, the player character becomes the Outlander, regardless of what narrative choices and identities came before. All difference is subsumed into the single identity of the Outlander, determined by the spatial relations between outside (Wild Space) and inside (the galaxy). One could argue that this is because of the constraints of game narrative: giving every player character the same identity makes it easier to write a story by eliminating the possibility for divergence. But this design decision also reveals how individuals are transformed by encounters with outside spaces and frontiers. Characters who experience the frontier are marked as outsiders who are essentially different from others in the main galaxy. This trope is common in American frontier fiction, including prominent characters such as Hawkeye in James Fenimore Cooper’s *The Last of the Mohicans*, a frontiersman who

16 “Chapter II,” *Star Wars: The Old Republic: Knights of the Eternal Throne*, developed by BioWare, published by Electronic Arts, 2016, Video Game.

17 “Chapter XI,” *Star Wars: The Old Republic: Knights of the Fallen Empire*, developed by BioWare, published by Electronic Arts, 2015, Video Game.

18 Matt Hills, “Defining Cult TV,” 513.

does not belong in the colonial settlements he originally comes from. Similarly to these characters, the player character is redefined as the Outlander because of their exposure to Wild Space and, through their exploits on the frontier, they play a role in reshaping the internal logic of the galaxy.

The frontier therefore presents a slippage between the outside and the inside, and this is precisely what transpires in the Outlander. At the beginning of *Fallen Empire*, the Outlander is brought before Valkorion, but manages to kill him with the help of Valkorion's son Arcann. This is all part of Valkorion's plan to extend his power by transferring his spirit to the Outlander's body. Outside space, personified in Valkorion, becomes a part of inside space, personified in the Outlander, and the boundaries between these spaces and characters start to blur. While this happens on the level of individual characters, it also happens with the larger narrative universe. As the player learns more about Zakuul and Wild Space, these spaces become more familiar and are assimilated into the internal logic of the galaxy. In this way, the hyperdiegetic cycle expands the narrative universe, changing it through encounters with outside space.

### **"If you had travelled far enough"**

Having established an understanding of what outside spaces are and how they function as frontiers in the hyperdiegetic cycle, one can now turn to their effects. The original *KotOR* game was released in 2003; it precedes *TOR* and its expansions in both the franchise and narrative timeline. *KotOR* places players in the role of Revan, a Jedi knight who broke with the Jedi Order in order to fight a questionable war. After winning that war, Revan journeys with his apprentice to the Unknown Regions beyond the edge of the galaxy and returns changed, as explained by the character Carth Onasi in the game: "When they left after the Mandalorian Wars ended, they were Jedi. When they returned ... they were something else." On the surface, Revan and his apprentice are Sith Lords typical of the franchise, but Carth's words suggest something more—like the Outlander, they were essentially changed, transformed by their experiences with outside space. What they encountered were the ancient, powerful secrets of the Sith Empire and the Infinite Empire of the Rakata, which they used to their advantage. This is never fully explained in the game, however, and these outside spaces remain a mysterious threat that shapes Revan, his apprentice, and the galaxy they attempt to conquer.



The *KotOR* games reveal the violence of the hyperdiegetic cycle and how it engenders a politics of fear. The transformation presented by the frontier is seen by characters as a threat to the galaxy—particularly to its greatest champions, the Jedi. In a climactic scene in *KotOR II* (2004), the Exile (the player character) confronts three Jedi masters who explain why they exiled her from the Order for following Revan to war. As Master Zez-Kai Ell tells the Exile, “You had become different somehow, changed.” As with Revan, the Exile’s experiences at the edges of the galaxy transformed her into an outsider and the Jedi feared that her mere presence would force a similar transformation on them: “And if you had stayed, you would have changed us, and that we could not allow.” Rather than confront outside spaces and their unknown contents, the Jedi chose to retreat within themselves and remain as they were. Change to the galaxy’s institutions, philosophies, and identities is suspicious and dangerous, and those that engender change must be expelled—like the Exile. This politics of isolationism demonstrates a xenophobia that is ultimately self-defeating, as Kreia, another character from the frontier of the galaxy, expounds in the same scene: “How could you ever hope to know the threat you face when you have never walked in the dark places of the galaxy, faced war and death on such a scale? If you had traveled far enough, rather than waiting for the echo to reach you, perhaps you would have seen it for what it was.” The fear of outsiders and outside spaces is the death knell of the Jedi and even the galaxy itself because it forecloses on the hyperdiegetic cycle and the possibility for growth. It is only by traveling “far enough,” by going outside the familiar and the conventional, that one attains the knowledge and perception needed to survive.

While isolationism within the hyperdiegetic cycle is untenable, the alternative of facing the frontier is always steeped in violence, conquest, and domination. As Slotkin argues with the frontier myth in American culture, this violence regenerates and makes one whole. *KotOR II* represents this in the Exile’s experiences on the edge of the galaxy, where she witnesses the cataclysmic destruction of an entire planet and hundreds of thousands of Jedi, Republic soldiers, and Mandalorians. The incredible violence and trauma broke her and led her to reject everything she knew before, turning away from the Force, the Jedi, and the galaxy to become a reclusive exile. The experience, however, also made her whole, as Kreia describes: “At last, you could hear. You were whole. And, at last, you saw.” Beyond the experience of one character, this process applies to the narrative universe as a whole when it encounters the threat of outside spaces operating by a logic different from its established internal logic. This encounter engenders a disruption, to use Hills’s language, that must be violently overcome. The disruption has



long-lasting effects and fundamentally changes the narrative universe by introducing new experiences, possibilities, and expectations for audiences.

The politics of fear and the violence of Star Wars's hyperdiegetic cycle point us to major ethical and political problems with the use of frontiers in narrative world-building. The portrayal of outside spaces creates excluded others who are always-already monstrous threats, objects to be used, and obstacles to be overcome. The fear of these spaces and outsiders portrayed by the Jedi in *KotOR II* is ever-present and channeled into endless, regenerative violence. In this sense, the hyperdiegetic cycle is founded on a colonial mythos that has a dark history of dehumanization, oppression, and genocide of peoples considered outside civilization. This is especially pernicious when it makes audiences uncritical of and complicit in the violence, such as when the player finally claims the Eternal Throne and conquers the galaxy in *TOR*. By fighting Valkorion, the player completes the cycle of violence, eventually internalizing and employing the same structures of power and domination against which they fought.

Despite being games, in which one would expect greater opportunity for audience agency and narrative emergence, the *KotOR* series presents this outcome as inevitable. One can play within this narrative, but never against it. In this regard, the potential for positive transformation and renewal through the hyperdiegetic cycle is foreclosed and the narrative merely reinscribes the violence that drives it. This situation is not unique to the *KotOR* games, but remains present and seemingly unchallenged in Disney-era Star Wars. Supreme Leader Snoke and the First Order, for example, demonstrate many of the same features revealed in Valkorion and Zakuul. Snoke is a powerful unknown whose identity, origins, and motives remain, thus far, a similar kind of mystery. He and the First Order are new threats to the galaxy's internal logic from the Unknown Regions that must be violently stopped. Opposing them will shape the galaxy and repeat the hyperdiegetic cycle, just as it has before.

However, there are potential ways out of this trap, one of which comes from within the franchise. The predicament of engaging in violence and becoming defined by it is explored in-depth in *The Clone Wars* television series that portrays the Jedi as they face a devastating war that blinds them to Palpatine's schemes. In the final episodes of the series, Yoda sets out on a journey to discover secrets that may yet save the Jedi. After facing a number of trials, Yoda arrives on the Sith world of Moraband to endure one last challenge in the series finale.<sup>19</sup> In the episode's climax, Yoda faces the

19 Moraband is a nod to the *KotOR* series, in which the same world containing the tombs of ancient Sith is named Korriban.

dilemma of either revealing the identity of Darth Sidious or saving Anakin. Sidious tempts him to abandon Anakin: "Let him go, let him die, and you can stop all I will do!"<sup>20</sup> Yet, fighting in this way would merely extend the violence and make Yoda culpable, so he sacrifices the opportunity in order to save Anakin. Yoda's decision suggests there is another way to fight and that there is perhaps a path other than violence. Yoda hints at this path at the end of the episode: "No longer certain that one ever does win a war, I am. For in fighting the battles, the bloodshed, already lost we have. Yet open to us a path remains, that unknown to the Sith is."<sup>21</sup> For the Jedi, this path is the ability to extend consciousness beyond death as Force spirits, allowing them to survive, pass on their knowledge, and eventually triumph as liberators rather than conquerors. Effectively, the Jedi thereby find a way out of the cycle of violence that plays into the Sith's hands—a different way to fight that is not defined by the domination and brutality exhibited in the Clone Wars. A similar (likely less mystical) path is possible for the hyperdiegetic cycle, but finding it requires a critical reconsideration of how we perceive and use outside spaces.

Outside spaces play a significant role in world-building and it is crucial to develop an ethics in how we represent and use them in order to avoid inadvertently re-inscribing the colonial mythology of the frontier. I suggest that there is another meaning or approach to outside space—one that can help break the cycle of narrative violence evident in *Star Wars*. One can face outside spaces and learn from them in ways that are not violent, controlling, and xenophobic. Certainly, one should resist threats of conquest and domination whenever and wherever they manifest themselves. But outside spaces are not always-already evil threats and expansion through conquest does not need to be the dominant mode of the hyperdiegetic cycle. Instead, one could embrace the outside, the unknown, the strange, and the other, along with the insights and new possibilities they hold. Only by seeking such paths can we hope to unlock the transformative power of hyperdiegesis and outside spaces, and to build narrative worlds that are more inclusive, equal, and just.

20 *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, "Sacrifice," season 6, episode 13, Netflix, March 7, 2014, written by Christian Taylor.

21 *Star Wars: The Clone Wars*, "Sacrifice."



## **Part III**

**“More Powerful Than You Can Possibly Imagine”:**

**Consolidating the Star Wars Franchise**



## 14. From Transmedia Storytelling to Transmedia Experience

### Star Wars Celebration as a Crossover/Hierarchical Space

*Matt Hills*

To date, transmedia storytelling has been analyzed formally, in terms of whether it promotes diegetic coherence or expansion,<sup>1</sup> as well as politically, in terms of how it articulates capitalist values.<sup>2</sup> Transmedia has also been theorized via audience productivity<sup>3</sup> and memory.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps unsurprisingly, given that transmedia extensions occur within a proliferating, ubiquitous screen culture, the issue of transmedia's locatedness in space and place has generally been under-explored. Only the subcategory of transmedia storytelling dubbed "Alternate Reality Games" (ARGs) has tended to merit analysis of extra-diegetic spatiality and how this is utilized within the ARG's real-world gameplay.<sup>5</sup> Otherwise, transmedia is assumed to float free of spatial constraints, flowing across devices, platforms, and varied screen media.<sup>6</sup>

However, this assumption does not match up with embodied and spatialized realities of transmedia branding/storytelling. Media tourism, for example, can involve the extension of film and television narratives through located performances forming part of an "experience economy."<sup>7</sup>

1 See Henry Jenkins, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide* (New York: New York University Press, 2006) and Matthew Freeman, *Historicising Transmedia Storytelling: Early Twentieth Century Transmedia Story Worlds* (New York: Routledge, 2016).

2 See Dan Hassler-Forest, *Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Politics: Transmedia World-building Beyond Capitalism* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016).

3 See Benjamin W.L. Derhy Kurtz and Mélanie Bourdaa, *The Rise of Transtexts: Challenges and Opportunities* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

4 See Colin B Harvey, *Fantastic Transmedia: Narrative, Play and Memory Across Science Fiction and Fantasy Storyworlds* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

5 See Paul Booth, *Digital Fandom: New Media Studies* (New York: Peter Lang, 2010) and Stephanie Janes, "'You Had to Be There': Alternate Reality Games and Multiple Durational Temporalities," in *The Politics of Ephemeral Digital Media: Permanence and Obsolescence in Paratexts*, ed. Sara Pesce and Paolo Noto, (New York: Routledge, 2016).

6 See Mark Boulton "Doctor Who: Adaptations and Flows" in *Science Fiction Film, Television and Adaptation*, ed. J.P. Telotte and Gerald Duchovnay (New York: Routledge 2012), 152.

7 See B. Joseph Pine and James H. Gilmore, *The Experience Economy: Work is Theatre & Every Business a Stage* (Boston: Harvard Business School Press, 1999).

The *Doctor Who Experience* based in Cardiff from 2012–2017 enabled fans to physically interact with a diegetic expansion and enactment of the Whoniverse. The *Harry Potter Studio Tour London* also enables fans to imaginatively “enter” diegetic spaces that are simultaneously physical spaces; it is necessary to travel to Leavesden to do so. In a sense, then, such media tourism can be thought of as transmedia tourism, and as Matthew Freeman has recently noted:

This attraction [...] allows audiences to visit the sets, props and costumes created for the films. As well as seeing the spaces from the story world in person, such as Privet Drive, the home street of Harry Potter [...] those audiences can also extract many of the physical artefacts from the story world by purchasing the likes of Butterbeer, Gryffindor [sic] scarfs [...] and wands.<sup>8</sup>

Here, transmedia storytelling facilitates a sense of the storyworld operating as if it were real and as if diegetic materials could become “extractable,”<sup>9</sup> i.e., capable of ontologically moving out of diegetic realms and into extra-diegetic spaces.<sup>10</sup>

Given Star Wars’s powerful links to merchandising, it has, of course, rarely been short of its own geographically and spatially located transmedia tourism, in the form of assorted exhibitions or displays occurring over time. Disney theme-park attraction *Star Tours* has offered a prime space for transmedia tourism and will soon be joined by *Star Wars Land* at Walt Disney World and Disneyland, a theme-park arena that promises to allow visitors to “fly” a life-size *Millennium Falcon* and to enter the Mos Eisley Cantina, among other delights.<sup>11</sup> If one mode of transmedia storytelling does indeed “flow” across spaces, then it should be apparent that a rival class of franchised *transmedia experience* remains, by definition, rooted in specific physical locations. In fact, located transmedia can confer value on these very places, positioning them as symbolically hallowed or “auratic” sites to which fans travel by way of “pilgrimage.”<sup>12</sup>

8 Freeman, *Historicising Transmedia Storytelling*, 30.

9 Freeman, *Historicising Transmedia Storytelling*, 30.

10 Bob Rehak, “Materializing Monsters: Aurora Models, Garage Kits and the Object Practices of Horror Fandom,” *Journal of Fandom Studies* 1, no. 1 (2013): 29.

11 Secret Cinema Presents The Empire Strikes Back also offered a Cantina experience in the lead-up to its “immersive cinema” production in 2015, though this occurred in Shoreditch Town Hall, East London, rather than inside an official Disney venue.

12 Matt Hills, *Fan Cultures* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 144.

In this chapter, I want to address one example of a Star Wars transmedia experience: the Star Wars Celebration event which has been run periodically by Lucasfilm since 1999 and which now features almost annually in Disney's roster of events. Having attended Star Wars Celebration Europe 2016 at the ExCeL in London,<sup>13</sup> I am interested in how the Celebration—as an official, corporatized convention—engages with multiple iterations of the Star Wars franchise. At times, Celebration Europe 2016 almost felt like a Star Wars trade show aimed at promoting and selling every officially licensed incarnation of the franchise to its established or new fans. Given that fact, I will begin by examining the transmedia completism on show at Star Wars Celebration (hereafter Celebration) and how it blurs together different versions of the franchise. I will then move on to consider how the event becomes auto-commemorative, as fans are encouraged to purchase a vast array of “show exclusive” merchandise that demonstrate the “extractability” not just of pseudo-diegetic merchandise but also of souvenirs that position Celebration as auratic. Its incessantly commemorative, nostalgic use of spatiality both reflects the integrative “transmedia economy” put in place by Disney,<sup>14</sup> but also implicitly restores an older, hierarchical model of transmedia storytelling set up by Lucasfilm. First, though, how does this official fan convention navigate its status as singularly brand-focused?

### The Crossover Space of Star Wars Celebration as a Mono-Brand Convention

Although fan conventions have arguably received less attention in contemporary fan studies than online fan practices, when work has explored the material culture of “Cons” then it has frequently focused on multi-fannish events bringing together fans of different film franchises, television shows,

13 See Emma Pett, “Cosplay Rey: Intergenerational fandom and the importance of play at the 2016 Star Wars Celebration, London,” *Deletion* 12 (November 24, 2016), <http://www.deletionscifi.org/episodes/episode-12/cosplay-rey-intergenerational-fandom-and-the-importance-of-play-at-the-2016-star-wars-celebration-london/>, for another critical account of Star Wars Celebration Europe 2016.

14 William Proctor and Matthew Freeman, “‘The First Step into a *Smaller World*’: The Transmedia Economy of *Star Wars*” in *Revisiting Imaginary Worlds*, ed. Mark J.P. Wolf (New York: Routledge, 2016), 234.



anime, comics, and so on.<sup>15</sup> Barbara Brownie and Danny Graydon also tackle this type of multi-fannish convention when they argue that:

The fan convention is typically a crossover space. Its participants are aware of multiple fictional universes, and those universes share the same physical space in the convention venue. As cosplayers move through this space, different fictional universes become blended in the same physical [location]. [...] This [...] is a condition that allows crossover fiction to occur.<sup>16</sup>

Yet, since Celebration involves only Star Wars it might be said that no such blurring or blending of diegetic material can occur in the extra-diegetic spaces of the convention hall. In contrast to the likes of San Diego Comic-Con or even London Film and Comic Con, Celebration offers a corporate sense of “full control” over the context in which Star Wars’s branded goods are encountered: “Disney and Lucasfilm’s profits extend beyond ticket sales to concessions and branded merchandise. And there’s nothing to distract fans from consuming that ‘Star Wars’ culture.”<sup>17</sup>

However, pitting multi-fannish conventions against mono-branded events (in a binary of “crossover storyworlds” versus a sort of “walled diegesis”) fails to perceive how different kinds of crossover and storyworld blurring can occur at Celebration. Such official events can gather together under one roof, or perhaps in one hall, every commercially available (and soon-to-be-available) version of a media franchise. At Celebration Europe 2016, presentations of Star Wars LEGO abutted those of the Star Wars Battlefront game; realistic Black Series action figures aimed at collectors were adjacent to Funko Pop’s highly stylized and cartoonish character renderings, and not far from Hot Wheels’s character-inspired diecast toy cars; tie-in novels were side-by-side with spin-off comics; and promotions for the then-forthcoming live-action film *Rogue One* and the animated

15 See, e.g., Louisa Ellen Stein (2015) *Millennial Fandom* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2015), 171-176 on “LeakyCon”; Lincoln Geraghty, *Cult Collectors: Nostalgia, Fandom and Collecting Popular Culture* (London: Routledge 2014), 93-119 on San Diego Comic-Con and 143-148 on Memorabilia/Collectormania; and Jen Gunnels “‘A Jedi like my father before me’: Social identity and the New York Comic Con,” *Transformative Works and Cultures* 3 (2009), accessed April 2, 2017, doi: 10.3983, on New York Comic-Con.

16 Barbara Brownie and Danny Graydon, *The Superhero Costume: Identity and Disguise in Fact and Fiction* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016), 112.

17 Kate Erbland, “Star Wars Celebration: What Other Studios And Festivals Can Learn About Balancing Art And Fan Service,” *IndieWire*, July 20, 2016, accessed April 2, 2017, <http://www.indiewire.com/2016/07/star-wars-celebration-europe-2016-art-fan-service-1201706742/>.

*Rebels* series shared promotional spaces. Whether repurposed for LEGO fans,<sup>18</sup> devotees of cute reversionings, or proponents of a darker Star Wars, all the differently merchandised versions of transmedia Star Wars collide at Celebrations. As such, the event offers fans a smorgasbord of storyworld options and fetishized diegetic objects—a transmedia experience that could be touched and photographed as well as purchased, thus furnishing fans with a sense of “haptic-panoptic control over images (and perhaps feelings) that formerly sped past them during [...] viewing.”<sup>19</sup>

As Nicolle Lamerichs has noted, the fan convention is a constructed site “in which the place is arranged to have connections to fiction.”<sup>20</sup> Yet, Celebration Europe 2016 was constructed to have connections to all of Disney’s different merchandised pathways into and out of the Star Wars films and television series, displaying a level of paratextual and transmedia completism for fans to revel in. Indeed, at *TheForce.net*’s Jedi Council Forums, fans compiled a list of all the “CE 16” show exclusives that were available. The auratic status of the event for fans<sup>21</sup> was therefore partly premised on gaining access to star actors and subcultural celebrity producers/performers, along with being among the first to learn Star Wars news.<sup>22</sup> But it was also produced through the fact that all current versions of the franchise were represented via their physical co-presence and highly unusual spatial adjacency.

Although fan-targeted stores such as Forbidden Planet tend to gather together Star Wars books, toys, comics, and other merchandise, there are product lines that they typically do not carry (e.g. video games), just as toy stores such as Toys“R”Us also exclude specific product ranges (e.g. tie-in novels). But at Celebration it does not matter if you are interested in a DK guidebook or a Del Rey/Penguin novel—Star Wars’s transmedia extensions are fully arrayed together. Of course, not all fans will consume all the various incarnations and expansions; as Cornel Sandvoss has observed, it is

18 Geraghty, *Cult Collectors*, 168–178 and Mark J.P. Wolf, chapter in this volume.

19 Kurt Lancaster, *Interacting with Babylon 5: Fan Performance in a Media Universe* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2001), 102.

20 Nicolle Lamerichs, “Embodied Fantasy: The Affective Space of Anime Conventions,” in *The Ashgate Research Companion to Fan Cultures*, ed. Linda Duits, Koos Zwaan and Stijn Reijnders (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 268.

21 Geraghty, *Cult Collectors*, 96.

22 Jason Scott, “From Behind the Masks to Inside: Acting, Authenticity and the *Star Wars* Co-Stars,” in *Cult Film Stardom: Offbeat Attractions and Processes of Cultification*, ed. Kate Egan and Sarah Thomas (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

common for fans to construct a sense of their own fan object by accepting some versions of it while rejecting others.<sup>23</sup>

And so visitors to Celebration, then, can plot their own specific pathways through the halls and exhibits in line with their specific interests. Even while doing so, however, one unavoidably walks past and physically encounters versions of Star Wars that are perhaps less familiar or possibly even charged with nostalgia. Despite not having collected Topps Star Wars trading cards since the age of ten or so, I particularly enjoyed the Topps stand, for example, and its show-exclusive merchandising. By bringing together such a proliferation of licensed paratexts, Celebration Europe positions fans as simultaneously nostalgic and current consumers, both opening a door to transmedia memories of Star Wars comics and cards from childhood<sup>24</sup> and cueing transmedia recollections of recent novels or television series.<sup>25</sup> The density of this transmedia experience is very much akin to one possible future for transmedia envisaged by Matthew Freeman when he writes of “experiential convergence, bringing together [...] multiple stories and multiple pieces of different types of media content—text, audio, comics, video, game etc.—within the same [space], [...] bringing together different forms of engagements, pleasures and media experiences.”<sup>26</sup> If Celebration can be said to act as a “crossover space,”<sup>27</sup> then it is exactly as a crossover of assorted media pleasures and experiences aligned with the Star Wars brand. Freeman’s future of transmedia is already here, not only in the example he gives (Blu-ray menu screens and hidden extras), but also in the form of corporatized and mass-attendance fan conventions.<sup>28</sup>

Writing about the *Doctor Who Experience* (DWE) in Cardiff, Paul Booth argues that this transmedia tourist attraction uses “convergent incorporation” to proffer a “commercialized incorporation of the fan experience.”<sup>29</sup> That is, fans interactively immerse themselves in the franchise by accumulating knowledge about its fictional universe and/or creating their own fictions, but the paid-for *Experience* shapes a specific version of “immersion” and

23 Cornel Sandvoss, *Fans: The Mirror of Consumption* (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), 131–132.

24 Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts*, New York: New York University Press, 2010), 184.

25 Harvey, *Fantastic Transmedia*, 146.

26 Freeman, *Historicising Transmedia Storytelling*, 199–200.

27 Brownie and Graydon, *The Superhero Costume*, 112.

28 Celebration Europe 2016 was rumored to host around 60,000 attendees across its three days; see Erbland, “Star Wars Celebration,” 2016.

29 Paul Booth, *Playing Fans: Negotiating Fandom and Media in the Digital Age* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2015), 103.

pre-scripted interaction whereby fans are required to play their part and behave in appropriately disciplined ways. As Booth puts it, “Engagement is key to convergent incorporation. The *DWE* is effective at convergent incorporation not only because it offers a ‘safe zone’ of fannish enthusiasm but also because it sequesters fandom into a particular arena.”<sup>30</sup>

Although Celebration Europe is a very different kind of transmedia experience—one built out of memories and promotions of multiple transmedia storytelling/branding—it too represents a “safe zone” of fan sentiment and a sequestering of fandom. As if being shepherded through an interactive “walkthrough adventure” (part of the *DWE*), fans at Celebration are disciplined into playing their part. Anyone who wants to visit the official Celebration Store, for instance, has to tolerate a lengthy wait in the queue unless they have privileged access. Anyone wanting to attend the Celebration Stage talks—e.g. Mark Hamill, Anthony Daniels, or Carrie Fisher, along with an opening day session promoting *Rogue One* and a closing session on “Future Filmmakers”—similarly needs to have queued very early in the morning in order to secure an entry wristband. Celebration has its rules and systems and attendees are required to observe them. On occasions, one uncovers a feeling of profound resignation rather than joyous celebration—that this is just what large corporate conventions are like and if you want the pleasures of access and exclusivity based on being there, then you simply have to put up with endemic queueing, extremely early starts, bad/expensive food, and so on. There are 594 reviews of Star Wars Celebration Europe 2016 on *TripAdvisor.com*—hardly a niche fan space—and many complain about the ExCel’s facilities and the queue times, with one contributor summing up:

The ExCel is exactly like every other convention hall I’ve been to [...] They just can’t cater for so many people all having lunch at the same time [...] A convention is hot, sweaty with lots of queuing. That’s pretty much guaranteed [...] My only peeve is how much the eateries charge, it is extortionate for pretty average food with shabby service. Again, unfortunately this is the same at all conventions.

Whether thought of as “experiential convergence” or “convergent incorporation,” Celebration is evidently not always experienced as celebratory. Warm-up hosts address the Celebration Stage spectators prior to the Star Wars guests coming on stage, for example, working to ensure that an on-brand level of excitement is forthcoming from the crowd. At the same time, fans

30 Booth, *Playing Fans*, 121.

are insistently addressed as “one of us,” with media professionals displaying their fandom:

More than anything, Celebration pushes the notion that “Star Wars” isn’t just *for* any and all fans, it’s made by them too. From Lucasfilm president Kathleen Kennedy to “Rebels” co-creator Dave Filoni, the sentiment that everyone who works on every “Star Wars” property is a massive fan of the universe is a common refrain. It was also a major theme of panel presentations featuring freshly minted directors like Gareth Edwards, Rian Johnson, Phil Lord and Chris Miller, all of whom shared stories about how much the original films meant to them.<sup>31</sup>

Celebratory Star Wars fandom and celebrations of fandom are hence constantly reiterated for attendees; celebration is the default affective performance. Yet, fan blogs and *TripAdvisor.com* reviews alike testify to aspects of the event’s misery and restrictiveness, where positive sentiment can only be achieved “despite” the commercialism, the hyping of new product, the constant queuing, and a need for “absurdly” early starts. As another fan blog similarly and more succinctly says in a *Spoiler Alert* review: “It was, as expected, crowded, expensive but damn right worth it.” Celebration’s disciplining of fans may appear ostensibly successful, yet it is achieved grudgingly, with many attendees exhibiting not univocal fan fervor, but, rather, a mixture of resigned annoyance and fannish passion. By contrast, the on-brand fandom of star actors, Lucasfilm executives, and Story Group members is resolutely upbeat. Even if these performances of fandom from the stage are entirely genuine, their unrelenting positivity nevertheless casts them as somewhat faux or posed. The fandom of paying customers seems more rebellious, more defiant, and more alert to the dark side of commercial exploitation.

Thus far, I have argued that Celebration Europe 2016 can be thought of as a transmedia experience rather than as transmedia storytelling: it auratically housed different mediated pleasures and transmedia expansions of the franchise within one event and, at one site, including commodified and professionalized fan art. But Celebration was not only a “crossover space” bringing and blurring together varied extensions of Star Wars, it also played a role in spatializing the hierarchies of the franchise’s “transmedia economy,” as I will now show.

31 Erbland, “Star Wars Celebration,” 2016.

## Star Wars Celebration as an Auto-Commemorative and Hierarchical Convention

Celebration may be, in part, a collaged promotion of transmedia storytelling where even the Lucasfilm Story Group has its own on-stage session, but it is not only a celebration of Star Wars's many iterations and extensions. Fans are also encouraged to celebrate being there at the event itself.<sup>32</sup> As well as paid-for photo opportunities and autograph sessions with celebrities, there are also chances to queue up and pose for a range of souvenir photos, whether astride Rey's speeder from *The Force Awakens*, standing in a gigantic replica of an action figure's card-backing (the illusory result of which is to make the person standing there appear to be an action figure), or participating in the Disney SnapCube photo booth, which automatically composites the Celebration logo into one's image. The SnapCube souvenir thus combines official event branding with indexical evidence of "being there," creating a branded authenticity that is entirely of a piece with the official merchandise on sale in the Celebration Store. Fans are not simply placed in a *mélange* of Star Wars transmedia; they are also placed photographically within Celebration's brand identity.

In addition, *Rogue One* costumes, props, and models were on display, with this exhibition serving to promote the latest film in the franchise. Fans could commemorate their presence at Celebration by snapping away in front of Death Troopers, for example. Likewise, fans fortunate enough to gain access to the *Rogue One* panel on the Celebration Stage on Friday, July 15, were given movie posters when they left the auditorium, making this an "extractable" souvenir of having been there. By contrast, fans who watched the panel screened on the second-tier stage, the Galaxy Stage, or in the Exhibitors' Hall, were not presented with a souvenir poster: this "gift" was strictly a marker of exclusivity, rewarding those who had successfully queued for entry wristbands.

We should not, therefore, view "extractability"<sup>33</sup> only as a matter of pseudo-diegetic merchandise that works to create the impression for fans that they have materially and physically entered diegetic space. This "object practice" of ontological bridging<sup>34</sup> is not just a part of transmedia tourism such as the *Doctor Who Experience* or *Star Tours*, given that a related practice

32 Matt Hills, *Doctor Who: The Unfolding Event—Marketing, Merchandising and Mediatizing a Brand Anniversary* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 72.

33 Freeman, *Historicising Transmedia Storytelling*, 30.

34 Rehak, "Materializing Monsters."

also forms part of Celebration's auto-commemorative activities. That is, fans are encouraged to take away mementoes from ExCeL London, especially materialized memories in the form of assorted photo opportunities. "Being there" at the auratic event can thus cross over into fans' everyday lives, blurring sacred and profane or extraordinary/ordinary culture. Other kinds of pre-structured souvenirs are, of course, provided by the many "show exclusives" that can be bought from exhibitors as well as in the Celebration Store.

And yet, there is one aspect of CE16's locatedness that is strangely glossed over by the event's key branding and auto-commemoration: its specific presence in London. When Celebration is based in the US, it is named after the host city; 2015 was Celebration Anaheim (Celebration events had previously been numbered, as if they were akin to instalments or episodes in the Star Wars saga itself). 2017, in turn, was named Celebration Orlando. Celebration Europe, however, retained this designation from the first CE event at the ExCeL in 2007 (CEII occurred in Essen, Germany, in 2013). The result of naming US cities yet exnominating London—at least in the official and on-brand title—is that America is defined as the unspoken, taken-for-granted home of Star Wars as a franchise. Different world cities are not placed on an even footing with regards to Star Wars Celebration; labelling some years as "Celebration Europe" or "Celebration Japan" demarcates them relationally as not-American. By contrast, hosting events at named US cities reinforces a sense that "Celebration America" can always remain unstated, with the US instead being wholly obvious and naturalized as the home of Star Wars. Some might argue that the UK at least has a claim to this designation, given that Pinewood Studios hosted production of *The Force Awakens* and *Rogue One*, with the original trilogy produced at Elstree in Borehamwood and *The Phantom Menace* utilizing Leavesden Studios. However, Pinewood's recent involvement was barely acknowledged in CE16's official merchandise, though the Pinewood Studios-based "Creature Shop" was featured in a Celebration Stage talk, "The Creatures, Droids & Aliens of Star Wars: The Force Awakens" on Saturday, July 16, whilst the ExCeL's relative proximity to Pinewood was also noted in the event's program book. Despite the President of Lucasfilm, Kathleen Kennedy, penning a sharply on-brand, celebratory message in the printed program that the UK is Star Wars's "second home," there is no doubt of its first home, given the manner in which this is structured into the very nomenclature of Celebration events.

But the largely unspoken US-centrism of Celebration is not the only hierarchy underpinning Celebration Europe 2016. The show's commemorative guide includes a rundown of different stages, beginning with the



Celebration Stage and concluding with the One Force Stage. The Celebration Stage/Auditorium is described as follows:

[it] will shine with the biggest shows and presentations of the weekend. Hosted by Celebration fan favorite and actor Warwick Davis, the Celebration Stage will present the not-to-be-missed productions [...] DJ Elliott and Mark Daniel will get the stage rocking before every performance. Get your seat early.

Following this up is the Galaxy Stage, which acts as an overflow screening venue for some of the Celebration Stage events such as the “Future Filmmakers Panel,” but also offers “a wide variety of panels and presentations that cover the depth and breadth of the Star Wars universe.” Thirdly, the Behind-the-Scenes Stage—rather curiously named since both preceding Stages serve this role just as well—is described as “hosting guests who made it happen for the movies, television, toys, books, comics and more.”

Disney’s model of an integrative rather than hierarchical Star Wars “transmedia economy”<sup>35</sup> runs counter to how Lucasfilm had previously valued George Lucas’s films, or “G-canon,” over events described in the EU of television shows, books, comics, and beyond. At the same time, Celebration continues to implicitly value the films over other media. The Celebration Stage is clearly presented as the main venue and it hosted talks with Mark Hamill, Anthony Daniels, and Carrie Fisher. One talk focused on *Rebels* and another on EA Games, but the considerable majority of “not-to-be-missed productions” were strongly oriented around Star Wars films of the past, present, and near-future. The “breadth and depth” of Star Wars transmedia only begins to be gestured at by the second-tier Galaxy stage, and it is notable that the EU texts are only explicitly referenced when introducing the third-tier Behind-the-Scenes stage. The transmedia experience offered to fans is, I would argue, very much coded hierarchically through the use of these differently sized and identified venues. Film comes first. Current television and video productions are admitted into the “premier league” of transmedia storytelling, but seemingly only somewhat begrudgingly; they certainly are not placed spatially on an even footing with Star Wars’s cinematic presence. Comics, books, and other transmedia expansions are relegated to secondary or tertiary status—these are very much made to feel as if they are *not* the main event and are there for subgroups and niches of attendees who may be interested.

35 Proctor and Freeman, “First Step into a *Smaller World*” 234.



In this implied hierarchy, fan-oriented stages are at the bottom of the league, with the Star Wars Fan and Collectors' Stage and the One Force Stage listed last. Unlike the Celebration Stage's promise to "shine with the biggest shows" and "not-to-be-missed productions," the One Force Stage is described in the printed program far more matter-of-factly in just two lines of text: "Presented by Jedi News [...] Enjoy podcasts, DIY cosplay presentations and more." Thus, there is a pronounced tension between the way Celebration is introduced by Kathleen Kennedy and the Celebration Team—both focusing on the fans and on the event as "by fans for fans"—and the politics of spatiality within the ExCeL, where major spaces are predominantly occupied by commercial exhibitors and by film-related marketing "reveals" and promos. Although this auratic event is undoubtedly a kind of transmedia experience, amply demonstrating the "experiential convergence" set out by Freeman,<sup>36</sup> it is also very much a hierarchical experience. Specific versions (and media) of current Star Wars are not more canonical than others in Disney's official discourses, but the movies nonetheless remain performatively and spatially dominant at Celebration.

In this chapter, I have argued that we need to consider transmedia not just as storytelling but also as a kind of experience; not just as a "flow" across platforms and screens, but as potentially and spatially located. Celebration offers one instance of how transmedia experience can possess a "crossover" quality, even at an official mono-branded convention. At the same time, the politics of convention space and place can work to prioritize films as primary texts at such events, over and above transmedia extensions, even where Disney discourses supposedly view all of these as part of a flattened, non-hierarchical transmedia economy. Transmedial hierarchies—in line with Lucasfilm's prior "G-canon"—can hence be tacitly restored within the commemorative Celebration event. Offering a completist's commercial and paratextual inventory of Star Wars's transmedia experiences,<sup>37</sup> Celebration spatializes and renders auratic the commodity-completism that it wishes to incite amongst dedicated, disciplined fans.

36 Freeman, *Historicising Transmedia Storytelling*, 200.

37 Geraghty, *Cult Collectors*, 97.

## 15. Space Bitches, Witches, and Kick-Ass Princesses

### Star Wars and Popular Feminism

*Megen de Bruin-Molé*

Since its acquisition by Disney in 2012, the Star Wars franchise has been widely praised for its feminism. New heroes such as Jyn Erso and Rey have been hailed as feminist triumphs for Star Wars and mainstream entertainment more broadly. New characters aimed at a new generation of fans, like *Rebels*'s pink-clad fighter-cum-artist Sabine Wren, and new novels devoted to characters like Leia Organa and Ahsoka Tano (from *The Clone Wars*),<sup>1</sup> are often cited as part of a growing commitment to female characters and to feminism by association. Likewise, the marketing force of Star Wars can now be felt strongly in female-targeted sectors (makeup, fashion, dolls).<sup>2</sup> Does all of this mean, as one reviewer put it, that Star Wars “finally awakens to a feminist world”?<sup>3</sup>

Such assertions have rubbed some fans the wrong way—after all, women have made up a significant and vocal portion of the Star Wars fanbase from the beginning.<sup>4</sup> As one fan commented, “I’m sure that people went ‘Wow!’ when they saw the first female Jedi in the prequels. The fanfic of the 1970s had women Jedi all the time and women smugglers. Nothing new there for the older fans.”<sup>5</sup> Will Brooker has also argued that the original female fans made the franchise their own through grassroots community-building,

1 Claudia Gray, *Bloodline* (London: Random House, 2016); E. K. Johnston, *Ahsoka* (Glendale, CA: Disney Book Group, 2016).

2 Lisa Richwine, “Disney’s ‘Star Wars’ Marketing Force Reaches for Female Fans,” *Reuters*, December 15, 2015, <http://uk.reuters.com/article/us-film-starwars-women-analysis-idUKKBN0TX1J720151215>.

3 Michael Roddy, “Star Wars: The Force Finally Awakens to a Feminist World,” *DNA India*, December 16, 2015, <http://www.dnaindia.com/entertainment/report-star-wars-the-force-finally-awakens-to-a-feminist-world-2156317>.

4 As one famous Star Wars fanzine essay asks, “If there are men in media fandom, they’re certainly very quiet. To turn about a feminist phrase then, why is half the human race so poorly represented in Star Wars and other media fandoms?” Pat Nussman, “Where the Boys Are,” in *Alderaan: The Star Wars Letterzine*, vol. 15 (Toledo, OH: Kzinti Press, 1981), 2.

5 Tish Wells, private email correspondence, November 14, 2016.

crafting, and fan fiction.<sup>6</sup> In other words, their fandom is built on free engagement with the storyworld and many do not feel a strong need to be validated or greeted as consumers of licensed merchandise.<sup>7</sup> Fan activity, of course, is not franchise-sanctioned and the kinds of stories that are licensed can certainly have a significant impact on a storyworld's feminist potential. While Leia's example is a powerful one, and although there are certainly more female role models in the franchise now than there were in 1977, can we call the Star Wars franchise feminist?

Broadly speaking, feminists believe in and advocate for social and political gender equality, but, as Mary Hawkesworth points out, feminism is "a collective noun" with many interpretations and aims.<sup>8</sup> Rather than trying to condense a rich discussion of feminism in Star Wars into just a handful of pages, in this chapter I offer a few examples from very different corners of the Star Wars storyworld. They illustrate some of the diverse "interpretations and aims" of feminist discourse that are created by the complex interplay between fans and the multi-authored, media-industrial Star Wars franchise.<sup>9</sup> First, I look at discourses of feminism and the representation of women in Star Wars, paying special attention to the stories outside of the films. Then, I explore the way the storyworld's non-narrative paratexts—toys, clothes, and merchandising—have impacted its engagement with feminist discourse. Finally, I look at some of the ways in which fans and storytellers have politicized Star Wars, and what this may tell us about the future of the franchise. These examples provide a brief but informative glimpse at the history of Star Wars's engagement with feminist discourse.

6 Will Brooker, *Using the Force: Creativity, Community and Star Wars Fans* (New York: Continuum, 2002), 199–220.

7 Jonathan Gray, *Show Sold Separately: Promos, Spoilers, and Other Media Paratexts* (New York University Press, 2010), 17.

8 Mary E. Hawkesworth, *Globalization and Feminist Activism* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 25.

9 For other studies of feminist discourse and Star Wars, see Brooker, *Using the Force*, 129–71, 199–220; Henry Jenkins, "Quentin Tarantino's Star Wars? Digital Cinema, Media Convergence, and Participatory Culture," in *Rethinking Media Change: The Aesthetics of Transition*, ed. David Thorburn and Jenkins (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 549–576; Diana Dominguez, "Feminism and the Force: Empowerment and Disillusionment in a Galaxy Far, Far Away," in *Culture, Identities, and Technology in the Star Wars Films*, ed. Carl Silvio and Tony M Vinci (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2007), 109–133; Gray, *Show Sold Separately*, 177–87; Derek Johnson, "May the Force Be with Katie: Pink Media Franchising and the Postfeminist Politics of HerUniverse," *Feminist Media Studies* 14, no. 6 (2014): 895–911; Mara Wood, "Feminist Icons Wanted: Damsels in Distress Need Not Apply," in *A Galaxy Here and Now: Historical and Cultural Readings of Star Wars*, ed. Peter W. Lee (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2016), 62–83; Carolyn Cocca, *Superwomen: Gender, Power, and Representation* (Bloomsbury Publishing USA, 2016), 87–120.

## Star Wars and Popular Feminism

*A New Hope* arrived in cinemas during what Michelle Citron has described as “a larger mainstreaming of feminism.”<sup>10</sup> Media fans were confident enough about the movement and its tenets to comment on the feminist potential of the products they were consuming and Princess Leia inevitably became part of this discussion. In the second issue of the fanzine *Alderaan* (1978), one fan wrote: “As a feminist, though I was delighted with Princess Leia, I was disappointed by the dearth of any other major female part—most especially among the pilots of the rebellion.”<sup>11</sup> In 1983, *Rolling Stone* described Leia as “the feminist from the fourth dimension.”<sup>12</sup> Although Leia was recognized as a feminist icon by some, feminist scholars generally ignored her. One reason may be that many influential feminist critics at the time saw little place for feminism in popular culture. Only in the late 1990s did this understanding of popular cinema as a “repetitive and formulaic system which reproduces the dominant ideology” begin to shift.<sup>13</sup>

Even then, most feminist readings of *Star Wars* were negative, in part because they focused on the story arcs of the films’ single female leads—first Leia and later Padmé Amidala. Margery Hourihan argues that Leia exists mainly to “invest [Luke and friends’] actions with ultimate approval and to mark them as true heroes.”<sup>14</sup> Diana Dominguez, likewise, writes that, while Leia remains “outspoken and unpunished,” she is primarily an enabler for male characters.<sup>15</sup> Padmé’s story, on the other hand, is read as a “disturbingly symbolic” representation of domestic abuse.<sup>16</sup> Carolyn Cocca devotes a chapter to Leia and Padmé in her book *Superwomen*, which also includes a discussion of Leia’s daughter Jaina Solo from the EU. Despite the many “feminist ideals” these characters embody, Cocca concludes that they remain relatively unchallenging, heteronormative representations.<sup>17</sup>

10 Michelle Citron, “Women’s Film Production: Going Mainstream,” in *Female Spectators: Looking at Film and Television*, ed. E. Deidre Pribram (London: Verso, 1988), 56.

11 Jeff Johnston, ed., *Alderaan Issue 2*, vol. 2 (Toledo, OH: Kzinti Press, 1978), <http://oaktrust.library.tamu.edu/handle/1969.1/153131>.

12 Carol Caldwell, “Carrie Fisher: A Few Words on Princess Leia, Fame and Feminism,” *Rolling Stone*, 1983.

13 Mark Jancovich, “Screen Theory,” in *Approaches to Popular Film*, ed. Mark Jancovich and Joanne Hollows (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 145.

14 Margery Hourihan, *Deconstructing the Hero: Literary Theory and Children’s Literature* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 173.

15 Dominguez, “Feminism and the Force” 112, 120.

16 Dominguez, “Feminism and the Force” 125.

17 Cocca, *Superwomen*, 87.

Opinion shifted again in 2015 with the release of *The Force Awakens*. In popular discussions, Star Wars's feminism was reframed as a progression from Leia (a powerful but solitary role model in the original trilogy) to Rey, who takes up the mantle of Jedi hero that previously belonged exclusively to the male protagonists of the films. This progression was also calculated by the amount of screen time given to female characters and how often they are allowed to speak in the old trilogy as compared to the new. For example, a recent YouTube video cut together all the lines spoken by women other than Princess Leia in the original film trilogy.<sup>18</sup> The total runtime was just over a minute and there is only a single line from *The Empire Strikes Back*. From this perspective, Star Wars indeed appears to have come a long way since 1977. The prequel trilogy was certainly more diverse in its casting than the original trilogy, with multiple speaking roles for both women and people of color, and *The Force Awakens* "has by far the largest number of women, period, in any *Star Wars* film."<sup>19</sup>

This perspective neglects several important factors, however, not least of which is the transmedial spread of the Star Wars universe. As Dan Hassler-Forest points out, "our immersion in imaginary storyworlds takes place not within, but *across*, media."<sup>20</sup> From the earliest days of Star Wars, the story existed beyond the films, spreading across novels, toys, comics, television shows and specials, video games, and more. As Star Wars itself illustrates, a transmedia franchise's feminist politics are much more complex because open-ended storyworlds are always subject to new readings, additions, and alterations.

Star Wars offers a strong example of why increased visibility and accessibility in film do not, by themselves, translate to political change. Joanne Hollows describes how early feminist film criticism tended to focus on images of and for women.<sup>21</sup> When discussing a popular storyworld's engagement with feminism, however, there are three factors to consider. The first is indeed representational and asks whether a storyworld contains engaging, fully realized female characters. The second is paratextual, pertaining to advertising, merchandise, and reception. Transmedia marketing often

18 Chris Wade, "Women Don't Talk Much in 'Star Wars,'" YouTube video, 1:23, posted by New York Magazine, December 1, 2015, accessed May 15, 2017, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ODgwL7DJ9dY>.

19 Cocca, *Superwomen*, 115.

20 Dan Hassler-Forest, *Science Fiction, Fantasy, and Politics: Transmedia World-Building Beyond Capitalism* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 5, original italics.

21 Joanne Hollows, *Feminism, Femininity and Popular Culture* (Manchester University Press, 2000), 39-40.

extends beyond the corporate control of Lucasfilm, but it still has a powerful impact on the way the Star Wars brand is consumed and interpreted. Finally, we must also acknowledge industrial and political factors of who is allowed to add to the story and feels entitled to claim it as their own. These factors are often invisible to average consumers and may not even be acknowledged by the storyworld's creators, but they are important if a transmedia franchise like Star Wars is going to inspire sustained, real-world change.

### Witches of Dathomir: Representing Feminism in a Galaxy Far, Far Away

To many fans, Princess Leia was a powerful role model for gender equality, but even she would have been hard-pressed to sustain 40 years of Star Wars fandom by herself. Padmé's character and narrative in the prequel films received mixed responses. Fortunately, despite the tendency of the Star Wars films to focus on a single female hero among a group of men, complex female characters have developed in media across the franchise. The numerous female characters in the texts of the EU (rebranded as Legends in 2014) have formed a large part of the continued draw for female fans. The best-known of these characters is likely Mara Jade, who first appeared in Timothy Zahn's novel *Heir to the Empire* (1991).<sup>22</sup> A former spy for the Emperor who became a smuggler after his death, Mara initially intends to kill Luke Skywalker, but is instead won over by the New Republic, becomes a Jedi, and eventually marries Luke. Mara was followed by many other popular female EU characters, including Jedi such as Bastila Shan and Jaina Solo, or scientists and soldiers like Jan Ors, Ysanne Isard, and Qwi Xux (the Death Star's lead engineer before Disney's canon reset). The 2003 video game *Knights of the Old Republic* even features one of the medium's few positive representations of older women and of disability in the form of the player's blind mentor, Kreia. Recently, Anakin's *Clone Wars* padawan

22 As Tracy "Dunc" Duncan of the long-running fansite *ClubJade* writes: "Mara is a huge reason I got into the fandom in the first place. And Mara was a large part of the reason I kept reading, which is *why* I stayed in fandom." Tracy Duncan, "Inside the Star Wars Generation Gap: Why We Still Care about Mara Jade," *ClubJade*, June 5, 2015, para. 5, <http://clubjade.net/?p=64034>. Not everyone was as excited about the character, however, and some first-generation fans saw her as "a stereotype of the 'empowered gos woman'" meant to tick a demographics box rather than appeal to existing female fans. Shanna Gilkeson, Facebook Messages conversation, November 19, 2016.

Ahsoka amassed a following that rivalled Mara's. As Cocca has pointed out, however, most of these characters do not really encourage serious discussions of feminism at all because they are "privileged in terms of race, ethnicity, class, ability, and sexuality, and face no discrimination in their seemingly postfeminist and colorblind universes."<sup>23</sup> Like Padmé, many of them meet unhappy ends, most commonly for the sake of adding dramatic tension to a male character's story. These trends in the EU material reinforce the disposability and secondary status of women in the franchise overall.

Many factors thus indicate that the Star Wars galaxy is a patriarchal one. There are many female political leaders in Star Wars, but while these individuals often stand against male-dominated systems—the Republic, the Empire, and, in some cases, the Jedi—they rarely succeed in toppling the galaxy's patriarchal customs and politics. Married women take on their male partner's surname and children take the names of their fathers. Luke's surname is Skywalker, not Amidala (or Naberrie), and Kylo Ren's birth name is Ben Solo rather than Ben Organa.<sup>24</sup> These narrative details obviously reflect our own world more than they do the potential of a science-fictional universe. Most of Star Wars's attempts to imagine a non-patriarchal society can be found in the franchise's non-canonical EU stories. For instance, the Tython Twi'lek community in the massively multiplayer online roleplaying game *The Old Republic* (2011) is matriarchal, as is the Noghri species from *Heir to the Empire*. Dave Wolverton's *The Courtship of Princess Leia* (1994) even brings three separate matriarchies together. The first is the Hapes Consortium, a system of planets populated by pirates but later united and ruled for thousands of years by a matriarchal society led by a ruthless Queen Mother. Much of the story takes place on the planet Dathomir, home to two female-led groups of Force wielders. One of these, the Witches of Dathomir, have allied themselves with the semi-sentient rancor species, who allow the Witches to ride and command them in exchange for special care and protection. The rancors, too, are led by a "herd mother."<sup>25</sup>

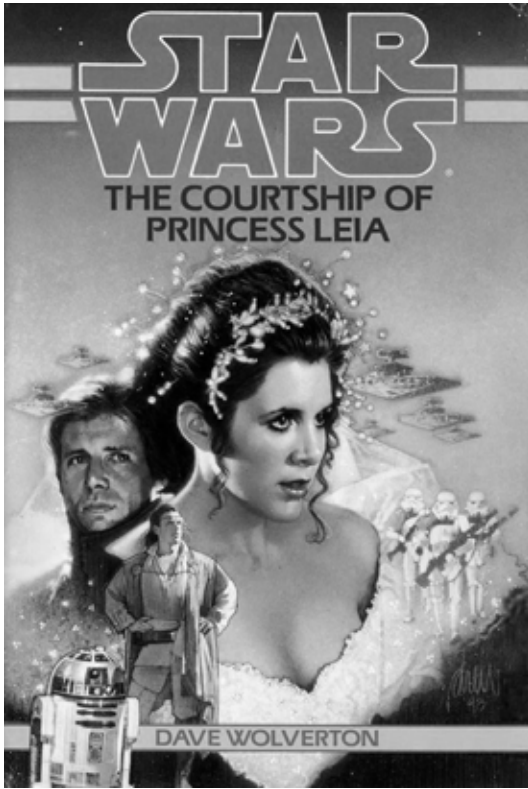
Published by Bantam Spectra, *Courtship* made the New York Times Bestseller list and received largely positive reviews from critics when it was first published in 1995. Following Timothy Zahn's hugely successful Thrawn trilogy (1991-1993), *Courtship* takes readers back to an earlier point

23 Cocca, *Superwomen*, 87.

24 The name Skywalker originally came from Anakin's mother Shmi, but was only passed down because the boy allegedly had no male parent.

25 Dave Wolverton, *The Courtship of Princess Leia* (New York: Bantam Books, 1995), 240.



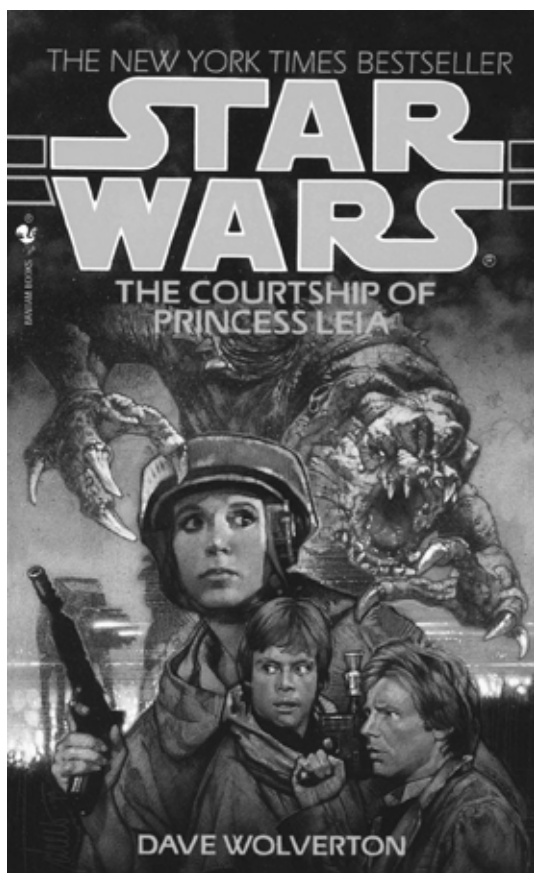


in the Star Wars timeline, telling the story of how Han and Leia developed from quarrelsome lovers into the happy couple depicted throughout the EU. In the novel, the Hapes Consortium offers Leia its wealth and power in the ongoing fight against the remnants of the Empire. Their offer comes with one condition, however: Leia must marry Isolder, the handsome prince whose wife will inherit the Hapan throne. Desperate to stop this marriage, Han kidnaps Leia and takes her to Dathomir, a planet he won in a card game. Luke and Isolder pursue them, only to find themselves embroiled in a conflict with the planet's inhabitants, the warlike descendants of a stranded group of Jedi.

The novel's reception by fans was mixed, with some considering it to be "one of the cheesiest and worst EU novels."<sup>26</sup> But criticism is generally leveled at *Courtship's* overstuffed plot, melodramatic dialogue, and heavy-handed

26 Scott Rhee, review of *The Courtship of Princess Leia*, by Dave Wolverton, *Goodreads*, May 16, 2015, <https://www.goodreads.com/review/show/1281835976>.





moralizing, rather than its depiction of women. This depiction is positive for the most part—or, at least, as positive as Star Wars depictions of any ruling class, male or female. Women are not evil simply because of their gender. Instead, like the male Force-wielders of the original film trilogy, the Dathomirians are divided by their ideological approach to power: the light-side Witch clans versus the dark-side Nightsisters. The way these matriarchies treat their subordinate male citizens (who lack Force sensitivity) is likewise divided by ideology rather than gender. The Witches have a complex gendered hierarchy, while the Nightsisters seem only to use men as slaves and breeders.

In a 2016 interview, Wolverton argued that his idea for *Courtship's* matriarchal societies came about because “there really aren’t a lot of powerful female characters in that universe” and he wanted to show “a

strongly feminist society where women were in control.”<sup>27</sup> Although it features matriarchal societies and strong female characters, *Courtship* is ultimately unconvincing as a feminist narrative. Luke, Han, and Isolder are the story’s real heroes. The Witches only defeat the Nightsisters and the Imperial Warlord Zsinj with Luke’s help, Han wins his battle for Leia’s affections, and Isolder stands up to his mother, the Queen of the Hapes Consortium, by choosing to marry for love rather than political advantage. While the novel also features powerful, positive depictions of older women, the Witches’ skimpy tunics and exotic headdresses harken back to the sexualized Amazonian warriors of 1950s science fiction.

“Feminism” thus becomes synonymous with “female-dominated,” and, like other readings of strong women in Star Wars, “plays to fears that feminism means not equality, but man-hating female superiority.”<sup>28</sup> As many fans at the time protested, *Courtship* also valorizes Han’s abduction and subsequent seduction of Leia, perpetuating the dangerous myth that women must be coerced into sexual consent.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, in spite of its gender-progressive ambitions, the novel consistently exoticizes and objectifies its female characters and caricatures the feminism it claims to support as a result. Though it opens up a space for feminist discourse, *Courtship* also serves as a useful illustration of the way strong female characters and stereotypically feminine genres (like romance) can still fail the most basic feminist expectations on numerous levels.

## Store Wars: Feminist Merchandising and the Gender Gap

While Star Wars’s representations of a matriarchal society are ideologically ambiguous, its gendered approach to merchandising has influenced the storyworld’s engagement with feminists and feminism most negatively in recent years. The idea that gendered toys can communicate certain heteronormative ideals to their young consumers is a familiar one. As Jonathan Gray has argued, both marketing and the way consumers interact with

27 “Bombad Radio #51: With Author Dave Wolverton/Farland,” YouTube video, 1:06:48, posted by Trail Makers, May 1, 2016, accessed May 15, 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jdb\\_RAJtop8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jdb_RAJtop8).

28 Cocca, *Superwomen*, 102.

29 See Doug McCausland, “Lit Exclusive: Dave Wolverton Addresses Fan Criticisms of The Courtship of Princess Leia, & MORE,” *Jedi Council Forums*, November 17, 2014, accessed May 15, 2017, <http://boards.theforce.net/threads/lit-exclusive-dave-wolverton-addresses-fan-criticisms-of-the-courtship-of-princess-leia-more.50024454/>, which includes Wolverton’s defense of this plot point.

licensed products such as toys create a message about the franchise. Such textual supplements, or paratexts, “tell us what to expect, and in doing so, they shape the reading strategies that we will take with us ‘into’ the text.”<sup>30</sup> In her doctoral dissertation on the gendering of toy packaging in the twentieth century, Elizabeth Sweet describes toys as “material objects that embody the prevailing ideas of the society in which they are made [...] [that] also act as an important tool for the intergenerational transmission of cultural norms and beliefs.”<sup>31</sup> When toys or other children’s merchandise are explicitly gendered as “for boys” or “for girls,” they transmit messages about the types of play and stories with which children should engage. Star Wars merchandise is no different.

On January 4, 2016, for example, just a few weeks after the release of *The Force Awakens*, Carrie Goldman tweeted a picture of a letter written by her eight-year-old daughter. It read:

Dear Hasbro,

How could you leave out Rey!? She belongs in starwars [sic] monopoly and all the other starwars games! Without her, THERE IS NO FORCE AWAKENS! It awakens in her! And without her, the bad guys would have won! Besides, boys and girls need to see women can be as strong as men! Girls matter! Boy or girl, who cares? We are equal, all of us!

Sincerely,

Annie Rose (age 8)<sup>32</sup>

The absence of Rey merchandise was read as an anti-feminist statement and an inaccurate reflection of the film’s own feminist sensibility. Annie Rose’s letter sparked a flurry of debate around the #WheresRey hashtag, intended to pressure toy companies into releasing more Rey toys, and more Star Wars merchandise “for girls” in general.<sup>33</sup>

30 Gray, *Show Sold Separately*, 26.

31 Elizabeth V. Sweet, “Boy Builders and Pink Princesses: Gender, Toys, and Inequality over the Twentieth Century” (PhD diss., University of California, Davis, 2013), 5, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1517101640>.

32 Carrie Goldman (@CarrieGoldman), Twitter post, January 4, 2016, 5:17p.m., <https://twitter.com/CarrieMGoldman/status/683819496759537664>, original emphasis.

33 A few days later, Hasbro announced that they would be releasing a new version of Monopoly that included the character. See Michelle R. Smith, “‘Star Wars’ Monopoly Will Now Include Rey after an 8-Year-Old Wrote to Hasbro Telling Them ‘Girls

Fans were quick to point out that this gap in the market was not new, nor had it gone unnoticed in the past. In the wake of another hashtag campaign, #WeWantLeia, as well as a “furious” father’s complaint about Hasbro’s Black Series Slave Leia (complete with neck chain) in his local toy aisle,<sup>34</sup> a mother’s 1983 letter to an Arizona magazine made the rounds of the internet. “Why is it that in all the mounds of Star Wars figures in all the stores in town there’s not a single Princess Leia to be found?” she asked.<sup>35</sup> One of the online magazines that circulated the letter framed the complaint as one in a long history of exclusion “that crops up regularly, in other words, because girls have always loved this franchise.”<sup>36</sup>

While this comparison between similar forms of outcry in 1983 and 2015 is provocative, it glosses over several important developments in the toy industry. For one, gender stereotyping in children’s toys has become far more pronounced since the late 1990s: “even when gender coding isn’t explicitly reinforced by obvious signage in stores or different pages on the web, the pervasive color coding of toys and the use of gender-stereotypical themes makes gender distinctions among toys impossible to avoid.”<sup>37</sup> The subsequent trend of basing children’s programming on toy lines, inspired in part by the phenomenal success of Kenner’s Star Wars action figures, prioritized boys over girls as consumers well into the 1990s. As Gray points out, Kenner’s color scheme and “framing of *Star Wars* as battle- and conflict-driven [...] hypermasculinized the toys. [...] Ads then carried this further, as did the packaging itself, which inevitably depicted young boys at play, not young girls.”<sup>38</sup> Indeed, toy companies have been “quite explicit about

Matter,” *Business Insider*, January 8, 2016, accessed May 15, 2017, <http://uk.businessinsider.com/ap-star-wars-monopoly-to-include-rey-after-8-year-olds-note-2016-1>.

34 Chris O’Connell, “Star Wars Action Figure Has Parents Furious,” *Fox 29*, July 13, 2015, <http://www.fox29.com/news/2029186-story>. “That’s pretty inappropriate,” he allegedly objected. “I got two daughters I don’t need seeing that crap.”

35 Susan Mills, “Where Are the Princess Leia Dolls?,” *The Courier*, December 9, 1983, sec. Letters, 5A.

36 Kelly Faircloth, “Parents Have Been Requesting Star Wars Toys for Their Daughters For Decades,” *Jezebel*, November 13, 2015, para. 5, <http://pictorial.jezebel.com/parents-have-been-requesting-star-wars-for-their-daught-1742316633>.

37 Sweet, “Boy Builders and Pink Princesses,” 1.

38 Gray, *Show Sold Separately*, 186. It’s worth noting that not all of Kenner’s toy products share this same set of representational biases. Its R2-D2 and Jawa “Bop Bags,” for example, feature both a young boy and a young girl on the packaging. The 1977 Early Bird Certificate Package commercials also featured a boy and girl playing with action figures together, and one of the three children in the *Escape from Death Star* board game commercial is female. When girls appear in these ads, they are often shown playing with the female-gendered toys in the advertised playsets, but otherwise they participate equally.

their strategy of segmenting the child market along gender lines in order to sell more products.”<sup>39</sup>

In the days of the original trilogy, however, toys were not nearly as heavily gender-marketed as they are today. Additionally, though most of the original Star Wars merchandise was aimed at children, Star Wars was everywhere by 1983, not just in children’s products. Chris Taylor describes the period as “more obsessed with the saga than ever, awash in *Return of the Jedi*-themed Pepperidge Farm cookies, AT&T Darth Vader phones, and Coca-Cola Star Wars collectible glasses. Kids donned their *Return of the Jedi* roller skates to visit the Jedi Adventure Center at their local mall.”<sup>40</sup> These products are not as clearly gender-coded as dolls or action figures, though some were certainly marked by the color schemes Gray describes.

But Annie Rose’s point about Rey’s centrality to the plot of *The Force Awakens* complicates the discussion of toy merchandising. In this case, a character who is central to the film’s plot is excluded from merchandise, allegedly because of her gender. With Leia, the situation is usually quite different. In its infamous “empty box” campaign of Christmas 1977, Kenner sold an Early Bird Certificate Package containing a Star Wars Space Club membership card, stickers, a set of cardboard characters, and a postcard that could be redeemed for an actual toy.<sup>41</sup> In the set of four action figures that could be claimed with these vouchers from the spring of 1978, Leia was included alongside Luke, Chewbacca, and R2-D2, suggesting her importance to the story.<sup>42</sup> She was also featured prominently on general merchandise like lunchboxes and T-shirts, and, in one instance, a set of Underoos.<sup>43</sup> While the mother in 1983 may not have been able to find Leia in her local toy store (perhaps due to demand or distribution issues), Leia was certainly out there.

Another concern with contemporary Star Wars merchandising involves the industry’s own attempts at “feminist” marketing. Derek Johnson writes

39 Sweet, “Boy Builders and Pink Princesses,” 2.

40 Chris Taylor, *How Star Wars Conquered the Universe: The Past, Present, and Future of a Multibillion Dollar Franchise* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 271.

41 See Ryan Lambie, “Star Wars: How an Empty Box Became a Must-Have Item in 1977,” *Den of Geek*, January 11, 2016, <http://www.denofgeek.com/go/38416>.

42 Though she was never as popular as the film’s male leads, Kenner/Hasbro made 44 Leia figures between 1978 and 2012. Compare this to Luke Skywalker, the most frequently reproduced figure, who had 89 versions in the same period. Including Leia, Hasbro has released 95 different female characters in total from across the franchise, many of which have multiple versions and releases (Padmé comes in 26 varieties). Taylor, *How Star Wars Conquered the Universe*, 206.

43 Jason Bailey, “The Most Bizarre Tie-In Merchandise from ‘80s Movie Classics,” *Flavorwire*, February 27, 2013, <http://flavorwire.com/373862/the-most-bizarre-tie-in-merchandise-from-80s-movie-classics>.

about various forms of “pink media franchising” in Star Wars, arguing that “the historical organization, production, and marketing of the *Star Wars* franchise has relied upon logics of gender difference that suggest unequal industry interest in reaching boys versus girls, and men versus women.”<sup>44</sup> In other words, he suggests, these marketing paratexts have “cast *Star Wars* as *almost always* for boys yet *sometimes* for girls.”<sup>45</sup> This perception has received the strongest outcry from feminist fans, but, as Suzanne Scott has noted, *how* the franchise appeals to girls is just as significant as whether it does at all. In her article on the gender politics of media paratexts, Scott argues that “when merchandise aimed at female fans does appear, these paratexts routinely function as heterosexist attempts to hail them as postfeminist consumer subjects, rather than acknowledging them as a part of the franchise’s pre-existing fan demographic.”<sup>46</sup>

Johnson, likewise, discusses the way twenty-first-century affirmations of female Star Wars fans are often synonymous with their re-absorption into a heteronormative, postfeminist princess culture. Specifically, he takes the examples of Katie Goldman, a girl who was teased at school for her Star Wars water bottle, and of Her Universe, an online fashion and accessories company managed by *Clone Wars* voice actress Ashley Eckstein. Although female fans are celebrated in both examples as “different,” Johnson argues that “both industry and vernacular media cultures repositioned these figures in relation to beauty, princesses, heteronormative romance, and other postfeminist (but traditionally feminine) ideological frames.”<sup>47</sup>

Another part of the problem, therefore, is that merchandise is generally reserved for the “official” portions of the franchise. The EU stories, which still proportionally feature the largest group of female Star Wars characters, are typically ignored. Likewise, fan fiction—as an unlicensed activity that draws disproportionately large numbers of female fans and that represents a diversity that official products have never come close to matching—is unrepresented in official merchandise. However, unsanctioned play can still have an outsized impact on mainstream readings of Star Wars, especially on perceptions of its engagement with feminist politics.

44 Johnson, “May the Force Be with Katie,” 899.

45 Johnson, “May the Force Be with Katie,” 900.

46 Suzanne Scott, “#Wheresreyy?: Toys, Spoilers, and the Gender Politics of Franchise Paratexts,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 34, no. 2 (2017): 138–147.

47 Johnson, “May the Force Be with Katie,” 895.

## A Woman's Place is in the Resistance: Rogue Readings and Feminist Activism

Historically, critics have not categorized Star Wars fandom as politically progressive. As Sarah Calise argues through an analysis of fanzines, “The *Star Wars* fandom, in particular, mirrored American society’s views on gender and sexual identities in the 1970s and 1980s,” though it became somewhat more welcoming as it developed into the 1990s and onto the internet.<sup>48</sup> Recent critical work has described Leia as the first feminist action hero of a new generation that came to feature outspoken and physically capable characters such as Ellen Ripley and Sarah Connor.<sup>49</sup> This characterization is undoubtedly owed in large part to Carrie Fisher, herself an outspoken feminist, who remained vocal about her role as Leia—and the sexism levelled at her and her character—until her death in 2016. In a 1983 *Rolling Stone* interview (the same edition in which Leia frolics on the cover in her slave-girl bikini), Fisher dismissed descriptions of Leia as a “space bitch”<sup>50</sup> and discussed the challenges of playing a strong female character:

You can play Leia as capable, independent, sensible, a soldier, a fighter, a woman in control—*control* being, of course, a lesser word than *master*. But you can portray a woman who’s a master and get through all the female prejudice if you have her travel in time, if you add a magical quality, if you’re dealing in fairy-tale terms. People need these bigger-than-life projections.<sup>51</sup>

This message of empowerment through fantasy is one that feminists (and female fans) took to heart in the ensuing years.

It may come as no surprise, therefore, that many also took their fandom into the realm of direct political action. Fisher’s death on December 27, 2016 closely followed the contentious election of Donald Trump and her name and likeness as Leia became a rallying cry among women in the subsequent

48 Sarah E. Calise, “A Force to Be Reckoned With: Women, Star Wars, and Controlling Cultural Production, 1977-1990,” Independent Research (Albert Gore Research Center, May 2016), 7, <https://sarahcalise.files.wordpress.com/2016/01/a-force-to-be-reckoned-with.pdf>.

49 See Gladys L. Knight, *Female Action Heroes: A Guide to Women in Comics, Video Games, Film, and Television* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010); Caroline Heldman, et al., “Hot, Black Leather, Whip: The (De)evolution of Female Protagonists in Action Cinema, 1960-2014,” *Sexualization, Media, & Society* 2, no. 2 (April 22, 2016): 1-19; Cocca, *Superwomen*.

50 Caldwell, “Carrie Fisher,” para. 2.

51 Caldwell, “Carrie Fisher,” para. 11, original emphasis.





months. The unprecedented Women's March on 21 January 2017 protested Trump's inauguration and sought to mobilize support for the preservation of women's rights. Posters of Princess Leia received substantial media coverage during the event, and one particularly popular sign, designed by Hayley Gilmore, read: "A Woman's Place is in the Resistance."<sup>52</sup> Still other images portrayed Trump as Jabba the Hutt, and dozens of "Jabba the Trump" memes and cartoons, some featuring a "Huttslayer" Leia character, were circulated online. Both sets of images situated the Trump administration within the Star Wars universe as an evil, anti-feminist force to be vanquished, and Leia as a feminist role model leading the vanguard.<sup>53</sup>

52 Others proclaimed "We Are the Resistance" and "Rebel Against Hate" beside an image of Leia, or depicted her as the 1940s icon Rosie the Riveter. Angela Watercutter, "Princess Leia Gave the Women's March a New Hope," *WIRED Magazine*, January 23, 2017, <https://www.wired.com/2017/01/princess-leia-womens-march/>.

53 Fisher's advocacy of the movement as Princess Leia lends this reading authority, if not the official Lucasfilm stamp of endorsement. Though many key Star Wars figures (including Mark Hamill, Daisy Ridley, and Lupita Nyong'o) came out strongly on social media in support of the



In these fans' reading of Leia, her position as a lone woman among men became a positive point of identification rather than a negative example of Hollywood gender inequality. Like themselves or like women they knew, Leia had faced numerous struggles and injustices in a patriarchal society, but nevertheless persisted. In this sense, Star Wars is made feminist by the fans, through public forms of "fannish play," even when the franchise's own message is ambiguous and often confusing.

In conclusion: Star Wars has not become fundamentally more or less feminist over the past 40 years. Instead, its engagement with feminist discourse has constantly shifted, shaped by the radical changes that both the transmedia franchise and the political movement have undergone. One thing that seems increasingly clear is that Star Wars tends to follow mainstream politics rather than revolutionary ones. Fans, however, have used their engagement with Star Wars to expand the boundaries of the storyworld and continually transform it into something with real-world impact. Despite the new Lucasfilm Story Group's efforts to ensure "all Star Wars stories tell the same story,"<sup>54</sup> ultimately it is not Star Wars's representation of women or its own feminist agenda that matters most, but rather how these representations and aims are continually negotiated and reinterpreted by fans, creators, licensees, and feminists around the world.

Women's March—and its use of Leia—Disney/Lucasfilm predictably refrained from mentioning either on its official channels.

54 Germain Lussier, "How The Lucasfilm Story Group Does Star Wars Canon," *Slashfilm*, April 20, 2015, para. 1, <http://www.slashfilm.com/lucasfilm-story-group-star-wars-canon/>.

## 16. Some People Call Him a Space Cowboy

Kanan Jarrus, Outer Rim Justice, and the Legitimization of the Obama Doctrine

*Derek R. Sweet*

One would be hard pressed to refute the argument that the Star Wars universe stands as an exemplary model of cinematic bricolage. Cobbled together from a variety of popular cultural artifacts, the *mélange* that is the Star Wars space opera famously draws from 1950s serials, samurai epics, war films, and Westerns. Despite the mishmash of textual references that solidified into one of the most recognizable transmedia franchises of all time, Douglas Brode has argued that Star Wars, despite its technologized, futuristic aesthetic, is primarily a story about “cowboys in space.”<sup>1</sup> In fact, the commonalities between the traditional Western and popular space opera seem so apparent to Will Wright that he positions Star Wars as “just another revision of the Western, the Western in intergalactic drag.”<sup>2</sup> Even Lucas’s penchant for the films of Akira Kurosawa, the Japanese filmmaker known for his samurai epics, strengthens the case for reading Star Wars as a continuation of the Western filmic tradition. As Michael Kaminski argues, Kurosawa studied John Ford’s epic Westerns and incorporated Ford’s “long tracking shots, tension-driven editing, widescreen composition, and dynamic movement” into his own works.<sup>3</sup> Though his admiration for the Western-influenced works of Kurosawa, as well as his own appreciation of Ford’s films, Lucas rehabilitates the Western mythos under a thin veneer of space opera.<sup>4</sup> One of the more obvious manifestations of this Western mythos in the Star Wars pantheon is the *Rebels* character Kanan Jarrus.

Nearly eight months before the October 2, 2014 premiere of *Rebels* on the Disney XD network, longtime Lucasfilm employee Dave Filoni (executive

1 Douglas Brode, “‘Cowboys in Space’: Star Wars and the Western Film,” in *Myth, Media, and Culture in Star Wars: An Anthology*, ed. Douglas Brode and Leah Deyneka (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 2012), 1.

2 Will Wright, “The Empire Bites the Dust,” *Social Text* 6 (Fall 1982): 120.

3 Michael Kaminski, “Under the Influence of Akira Kurosawa: The Visual Style of George Lucas,” in *Myth, Media, and Culture in Star Wars: An Anthology*, ed. Douglas Brode and Leah Deyneka (The Scarecrow Press, 2012), 90.

4 For a discussion of the relationship between horse opera and space opera, and how the latter is derived from the former, see Brode, “Cowboys in Space,” 2.

producer and supervising director for the animated series) introduced Kanan Jarrus, a character who confirmed that some Jedi Knights survived Emperor Palpatine's Order 66 and the ensuing Jedi purge in *Revenge of the Sith*. In a live-streaming video featured on *StarWars.com*, Filoni described Kanan as "the cowboy Jedi [...]. He's a gunslinger that needs to put the gun away and pick up the sword again to fight for noble causes and selfless causes."<sup>5</sup> Kanan's story, a narrative shifting back and forth from television series, to comic, to novel, marked Disney's initial foray into a transmediated Star Wars universe. Important for this particular essay is the way Kanan's transmedia representation reworks the familiar cowboy myth that is so intricately intertwined with US national identity and that intersects so strongly with contemporary foreign policy doctrines.

Grounded in the familiar narratives and iconography of the mythic American west, yet presented via the postmodern pastiche of futuristic space opera, the Star Wars megatext—the story that unfolds across films, comic books, animated television series, and other media—simultaneously reinforces and reconfigures the broadly accepted social truths of rugged individualism, the hostile frontier, and gunslinger justice. Indeed, scholars of Star Wars frequently argue that the mythic Wild West ethos developed by the original trilogy also has political resonance. Alan Nadel, for example, draws parallels between Cold War geopolitics and intergalactic politics as he illustrates the ideological commonalities between Reagan-era foreign policy on the one hand and the fictional conflict between the Rebel Alliance and the Galactic Empire on the other.<sup>6</sup> My own analysis of *The Clone Wars* (2008–2014) questions the black-and-white ethos of cowboy diplomacy and situates the animated series as an important cultural voice in ongoing wartime deliberations concerning just war theory, peace, torture, and drone warfare.<sup>7</sup> In a similar fashion, I turn my attention in this chapter to transmedial cowboy-Jedi Kanan Jarrus to illustrate how the Star Wars saga continues to reinvigorate and reconceptualize the familiar Western mythos. I argue that the animated TV series challenges the notion of cowboy diplomacy while calling on audiences to embrace President Obama's turn toward a

5 "Kanan, the Cowboy Jedi," *StarWars.com*, accessed November 11, 2016, <http://www.starwars.com/video/star-wars-rebels-meet-kanan-the-cowboy-jedi>.

6 Alan Nadel, "The Empire Strikes Out: *Star Wars* (IV, V, and VI) and the Advent of Reaganism," in *New American Canon: American Literature and Culture in an Age of Cold War*, ed. Steven Belletto and Daniel Grausam (Iowa City, IA: University of Iowa Press, 2012), 187–208.

7 Derek R. Sweet, *Star Wars in the Public Square: The Clone Wars as Political Dialogue* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2015).

supposedly more prudent, multilateral, and humanitarian approach to US foreign policy.

## Star Wars, Politics, and the Western Mythos

Kanan Jarrus stands as one of the first Star Wars characters to have his narrative arc woven throughout multiple media in the post-Lucas era: a novel, a twelve-issue limited comic-book series, and a television series. The idea that a character's arc might reach across multiple platforms stands as an example of what Anne Lancashire describes as an integrated megatext. For Lancashire, Star Wars is "not a series of narratively-independent sequels and prequels [...] but an epic mythological saga [...] consisting of [...] an intricately-designed narrative, mythological, and metaphoric whole."<sup>8</sup> Writing in the early 2000s, Lancashire could not have anticipated the expansion of the Star Wars saga to include the animated elements (*The Clone Wars* and *Rebels*) and the continuation of the Skywalker legacy via the Disney-backed third trilogy. With the rapidly expanding Disney-era canon, the familiar mythical elements of Star Wars continue to inspire consumers to meditate on their "responsibility to the world, to others, or to oneself."<sup>9</sup>

In his work exploring the mythic American West, David Murdoch moves beyond the common understandings of myth as a pedagogical means of discerning and reinforcing communal values and turns to an examination of how certain myths mediate specific cultural tensions. These pragmatic, functional myths "arise as a means of dealing with a fundamental contradiction which compromises core-values of the society, the sort of conflict which causes a persistent dilemma in the collective unconscious."<sup>10</sup> To make his point regarding myth as the site of conflict mediation clear, Murdoch turns to the classic legend of King Arthur. The Arthurian mythos, he posits, explores a basic inconsistency underlying feudal society: the tension between the Church's emphasis on transcendent spiritual values like peace and care for the other and the political system's focus on social order through violence and class exploitation. The narratives of heroic characters who strive relentlessly to live up to spiritual ideals,

8 A. Lancashire, "The Phantom Menace: Repetition, Variation, Integration," *Film Criticism* 24 (2000): 24.

9 John C. McDowell, *The Gospel According to Star Wars: Faith, Hope, and the Force* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2007), 13.

10 David H. Murdoch, *The American West: The Invention of a Myth* (Cardiff: Welsh Academic Press, 1996), 16.

but fall hopelessly short of doing so, provide solace for those encountering the Arthurian myths. In a similar fashion, the myth of the American West functions to mediate a societal conflict: the tension between reified social, economic, and political institutions benefiting cultural elites and a rustic, national wisdom grounded in “chivalry, honour, courage, and self-reliance.”<sup>11</sup> The mythic embodiment of this American cultural tension is, of course, the Western cowboy.

While Murdoch's work illustrates how familiar cultural myths invite audiences to engage relevant social tensions and controversies, I want to shift attention to the way the Western mythos permeates US political narratives. Since the late nineteenth century, representations of the self-reliant cowboy conquering the American frontier have been frequently associated with presidents' personas and policies. Theodore Roosevelt, for example, characterized himself as a man reinvigorated by the violence and hard work accompanying a Western frontiersman's struggles to subdue both the natural world and his own unruly spirit. When Roosevelt wrote about the cowboy, asserts Murdoch, he was writing not only about the people he encountered in the Dakotas, but also about himself and the American people at large.<sup>12</sup> Always the savvy politician, Roosevelt cultivated the image of the cowboy as he rode his way back into political relevance and, eventually, the White House. John F. Kennedy also drew from the mythic West by replacing “an old, domestic, agrarian frontier” with a “new frontier of world power and industrial development.”<sup>13</sup> Though Kennedy did not refer to the archetypal cowboy directly, he did call on Americans to muster their courage and sense of adventure as they turned toward the perils and opportunities—a metaphorical frontier—facing the nation in the latter part of the twentieth century.

Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush both embraced the Western mythos as part of their respective presidencies and foreign policy doctrines. A political doctrine, suggests Donette Murray, embodies the guiding principles of an administration, principles that offer a justification for why, when, and how a particular administration chooses to act, or not to act, in particular geopolitical circumstances.<sup>14</sup> In his April 1, 1985 article for *Time* magazine, Charles Krauthammer used the phrase “The Reagan Doctrine” to describe

11 Murdoch, *The American West*, 21.

12 Murdoch, *The American West*, 68–69.

13 Slotkin, *Gunfighter Nation*, 3.

14 Donette Murray, “Military Action but Not as We Know it: Libya, Syria and the Making of an Obama Doctrine,” *Contemporary Politics* 19, no. 2 (June 2013): 148.

the Reagan administration's emerging policy of "overt and unashamed American support for anti-Communist revolution."<sup>15</sup> The doctrine, steeped in the unambiguous moral imagery of the frontier myth, marked the return of the US as the heroic, white-hatted cowboy protecting the dangerous global frontier from relentless communist adversaries. When Reagan referred to the Soviet Union as the "evil empire," and made reference to the space-based Strategic Defense Initiative program as "Star Wars," he reinforced a political link between his Western-infused rhetoric and the Star Wars franchise.<sup>16</sup>

Although the Western experienced a decline during the late 1960s and 1970s, the genre and its mythological themes did not disappear altogether.<sup>17</sup> As Stephen McVeigh observed in his discussion of the Star Wars films as commentary on US foreign policy, the prolonged conflict in Vietnam undermined American faith in two fundamental cultural myths: the myth of the frontier and the myth of the superpower. The cultural trauma stemming from the Vietnam conflict, particularly the atrocities committed by US troops, raised important questions regarding the nation's position as a morally righteous lawman. Likewise, the war "damaged the super power myth by showing, that for all its might, a collection of untrained, poorly equipped guerrillas could stymie the vast resources of the American military machine."<sup>18</sup> McVeigh illuminated these deteriorating cultural myths and maintained that the Star Wars films, particularly *A New Hope*, offered a narrative that rehabilitated both. In one sense, the Western mythos resurfaced in Star Wars by transporting "the tropes and conventions of the Western from Earth to another galaxy" and, in doing so, "recontextualized America's Cold War ethos" to one wherein the US assumed the role of the beleaguered yet stalwart cowboy attempting to blaze a geopolitical and ideological trail of freedom, justice, and democracy.<sup>19</sup> At the same time, the films also criticized the impotence and immorality of US imperialism. M. Keith Booker's analysis of the original trilogy, for example, offers an

15 Charles Krauthammer, "The Reagan Doctrine," *Time* 125, no. 13 (April 1985): 54.

16 Peter Krämer offers an excellent overview of the intersection between Reagan's political rhetoric and the Star Wars films, Peter Krämer, "Star Wars," *History Today* 49, no. 3 (1999): 41-47.

17 For an exploration of why films like Star Wars supplanted the traditional Western during the 1970s and beyond, see Wright, "The Empire Bites the Dust."

18 Stephen P. McVeigh, "The Galactic Way of Warfare," in *Finding the Force of the Star Wars Franchise: Fans, Merchandise, and Critics*, ed. Matthew W. Kapell et al. (New York: Peter Lang, 2006): 39.

19 Nadel, "The Empire Strikes Out" 191.

alternative reading wherein the US had more in common with the Empire and the rebels were more akin with the Viet Cong.<sup>20</sup>

These dual readings of the saga's central conflict, then, concurrently depicted the US as regaining its moral footing as a righteous protector of the people and warned against the dark side temptations associated with imperialism. In the more commonly articulated reading, such familiar characters as the naïve homesteader, the worldly cardsharp, and the retired gunslinger—respectively, Luke Skywalker, Han Solo, and Obi-Wan Kenobi—graced the big screen and encouraged many moviegoers to interpret the conflict between the principled Rebel Alliance and the nefarious Galactic Empire as an analog to the Cold War conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. Similar to the filmic portrayal of the Rebel Alliance, a small group of moralistic freedom fighters who found themselves surrounded by the expansive, authoritarian Galactic Empire, political dialogue of the late twentieth century positioned the US as a virtuous tin star “surrounded and outnumbered by hostile adversaries.”<sup>21</sup>

Whereas the Reagan Doctrine foregrounded a hostile frontier thematic, the Bush Doctrine emphasized the figure of the retired gunfighter. As Stacy Takacs observes in her essay unpacking the relationship between the television Western and American politics, the characterization of the United States as “a reluctant gunslinger forced by circumstances to resort to violence” is a mainstay of US political discourse.<sup>22</sup> Just as he had done for Reagan, Krauthammer offered an explanation for George W. Bush's evolving foreign policy. The Bush Doctrine, argued Krauthammer in his September 13, 2008 piece for the *Washington Post*, consisted of four interlocking parts: unilateralism, or the proclivity to disregard stakeholders and act solely in US interests (for example, the US withdrawal from the 2001 Kyoto Protocol, a greenhouse gas treaty agreement); a “with us or against us” approach to post-9/11 counterterrorism efforts; preemptive war to protect US interests; and an emphasis on democratic nation-building as a means of ensuring global peace. The Bush administration's unilateral and preemptive policies, particularly in the War on Terror and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, contributed to Bush's portrayal as a rugged, self-reliant do-gooder standing against the savages of the global plains.

20 M. Keith Booker, *Alternate Americas: Science Fiction Film and American Culture* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2006), 116.

21 Nadal, “The Empire Strikes Out,” 189.

22 Stacy Takacs, “The Contemporary Politics of the Western Form: Bush, *Saving Jessica Lynch*, and *Deadwood*,” in *Reframing 9/11: Film, Popular Culture and the “War on Terror,”* ed. Jeff Birkenstein, Anna Froula, and Karen Randell (New York: Continuum, 2010), 153.



This image of the reluctant gunslinger forced to strap on a six-shooter and bring order to the lawless geopolitical frontier, particularly as referenced by the Bush administration, corresponded with the reticence of the prequel films' Jedi Knights to get directly involved in galactic conflicts. This time, however, the Western-infused Star Wars franchise openly criticized US foreign policy. A.O. Scott's May 16, 2005 *New York Times* review of *Revenge of the Sith*, for example, described the film as a cautionary tale "about how a republic dismantles its own democratic principles, about how politics becomes militarized, about how Manichaeism undermines the rational exercise of power." As the film's writer-director, Lucas spotlighted the flawed logic of black-and-white geopolitics through Anakin's "If you're not with me, you're my enemy" challenge to his mentor, Obi-Wan Kenobi.

## The Obama Doctrine and Outer Rim Justice

Given the costs associated with the military operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as waning public support for the extended military occupations, President Obama's decision to change foreign policy's course should come as no surprise.<sup>23</sup> The emergence of an Obama Doctrine, predicated on the notions of austerity and war fatigue, shifted foreign policy away from blunt military force and toward covert operations and drone strikes. Andreas Krieg observed that "Obama appears to prefer waging war in the shadows with a light footprint and if possible limited public scrutiny."<sup>24</sup> Moreover, a turn toward soft power represented a fundamental about-face: the US would foster collaborative international relationships rather than going it alone. Obama's move away from unilateralism and toward multilateralism, suggests Toshihiro Nakayama, marked a recognition by US policymakers

23 Mark Thompson's January 1, 2015 *Time* article titled "The True Cost of the Afghanistan War May Surprise You" cites figures from the Congressional Research Service that estimates the combined cost of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts at over \$1.5 trillion. According to a February 2015 blog post by the Brown University Watson Institute for International and Public Affairs, over 6,800 troops lost their lives along with 6,900 independent security contractors. According to a March 19, 2008 Pew Research Center report of "Public Attitudes Toward the War in Iraq: 2003-2008," support for military action in Iraq had dropped from 72% to 38%. Similarly, as reported by Jennifer Pinto in her October 5, 2009 *CBSNews.com* article "Public's Views of Afghanistan War have Turned Sour," a *New York Times/CBS News* poll found that only 47% percent of respondents supported continued US involvement (down from 90% immediately following 9/11).

24 Andreas Krieg, "Externalizing the Burden of War: the Obama Doctrine and US Foreign Policy in the Middle East," *International Affairs* 92, no. 1 (January 2016): 97.



that the world is an increasingly complex place and “that the issues the world confronts today have become too complicated for a single nation to provide answers.”<sup>25</sup> Finally, the doctrine also embraced prudence when contemplating military intervention for humanitarian ends. In his August 2016 cover article for *The Atlantic* titled “The Obama Doctrine,” Jeffrey Goldberg interviewed the sitting president regarding his foreign policy philosophy. When asked about US intervention on humanitarian grounds, Obama responded with his trademark pragmatism:

I also believe that the world is a tough, complicated, messy, mean place, and full of hardship and tragedy. And in order to advance both our security interests and those ideals and values that we care about, we’ve got to be hardheaded at the same time as we’re big hearted, and pick and choose our spots, and recognize that there are going to be times where the best that we can do is to shine a spotlight on something that’s terrible, but not believe that we can automatically solve it.

The shift away from military occupation (e.g. of Iraq and Afghanistan) toward special forces operations and drone strikes as the primary weapons in the counterterrorism arsenal, as well as the move toward UN-backed, multinational humanitarian operations (e.g. the 2011 Libya intervention), exemplified Obama’s commitment to a complicated calculus concerning security interests, risk factors, and human suffering.

As a reconfiguration of the traditional gunfighter made politically relevant for the twenty-first century, Kanan echoes both the tensions contributing to the emergence of the Obama Doctrine as well as the doctrine itself. The *Rebels* storyline commences roughly fifteen years after the rise of the Empire, depicting the people of the Outer Rim Territories as downtrodden and weary from years of Imperial occupation. Overworked and lacking resources, inhabitants of planets such as Lothal shuffle through their day-to-day lives. Kanan’s backstory, developed in comic books and a novel, further reinforces the bleak atmosphere of the television show. While the first six issues of the *Kanan* comic—collected in a trade paperback titled *Kanan: The Last Padawan*—show hungry and exhausted former Jedi padawan Caleb Dume struggling to survive in the days immediately following Order 66, the novel *A New Dawn* describes the twenty-something—now

25 Toshihiro Nakayama, “Strategic Patience in a Turbulent World: The Obama Doctrine and its Approach to the World,” *Asia-Pacific Review* 22, no. 1 (May 2015): 4–5. [1–15]

going by the alias Kanan Jarrus—as a dispirited drifter moving aimlessly from one job to another.<sup>26</sup>

Kanan's experiences as a war veteran struggling to contextualize the conflict he survived reinforces the connection with post-9/11 war fatigue. Although *Rebels*, as the name suggests, is a series exploring the emergence of an organized military resistance against the Empire, Kanan expresses opposition to becoming an active participant. Like Ethan Edwards in John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956), a cowboy scarred by his service as a Confederate soldier, or the 2002 television show *Firefly*'s Malcolm Reynolds, a psychologically wounded former resistance fighter, Kanan's military service left an indelible mark. When the crew of Kanan's starship *Ghost* is drawn into organized resistance operations more frequently, the character's ability to avoid large-scale military combat and maintain his status as a retired gunslinger becomes increasingly difficult. He expresses his dismay to longtime friend and crewmate Hera Syndulla:

*Kanan:* I survived one war. I'm not ready for another one. I saw what it did.

*Hera:* To the Jedi.

*Kanan:* To everyone.<sup>27</sup>

The exchange captures Kanan's personal loss—that of the Jedi Order—and points toward broader consequences for the soldier, innocents caught in the crossfire, and the galaxy at large. Unlike a gunfight at high noon, or a lightsaber duel in the reactor chamber of a Star Destroyer, war always harms those on the periphery. Kanan's wartime trauma is exposed when he relates his experiences to Ezra, a Force-sensitive he has taken on as his own padawan learner. As he recounts: "It was at the end, the end of the war. Our fellow soldiers, the clones, the ones we Jedi fought side by side with, suddenly turned and betrayed us. I watched them kill my master. She fought beside them for years and they gunned her down in a second. Then they came for me."<sup>28</sup> This important moment in the *Rebels* narrative leaves the details of Kanan's trauma unexplored; *Kanan: The Last Padawan*, however, picks up the storyline and describes, in graphic detail, the moment clone

26 *Kanan: The Last Padawan*, written by Greg Weisman, drawn by Pepe Larraz and Jacopo Camagni, and colored by David Curiel (New York: Marvel Entertainment, 2015); John Jackson Miller, *A New Dawn* (New York: Del Rey, 2015).

27 *Star Wars Rebels*, "The Siege of Lothal," season 2, episodes 1-2, directed by Bosco Ng and Brad Rau, written by Henry Gilroy, Disney XD, June 20, 2015.

28 *Star Wars Rebels*, "The Lost Commanders," season 2, episode 3, directed by Dave Filoni and Sergio Paez and written by Matt Michnovetz, Disney XD, October 14, 2015.

troopers turned on Caleb and his Jedi Master, Depa Billaba, who sacrificed herself so Caleb could live.

Just as Kanan reverberates with the war fatigue experienced by much of the US public, he also epitomizes the tenets of the Obama Doctrine: prudent militarism, multilateralism, and humanitarianism. One of the differences between Kanan and other cowboy referents in the Star Wars megatext is his reluctance to engage in full-scale military operations. Unlike Luke Skywalker, a farmer, and Obi-Wan Kenobi, a retired fighter, who rush headlong into a sprawling galactic conflict, Kanan resists the call to become embroiled in a public shootout or high noon showdown. In the premiere episode of *Rebels*'s second season, "The Siege of Lothal," Kanan expresses his reluctance to join the rebellion and suggests that a fight against the Empire complicates their primary mission: helping those in need. He states, "Fighting alongside soldiers isn't what I signed up for [...] When you and I started together it was rob from the Empire and give to the needy. A noble cause. But now we're getting drawn into some kind of military thing. I don't like it."<sup>29</sup> Doing his best to avoid being pulled into a direct conflict with the Empire, Kanan fights a "war in the shadows" rather than on the front lines. Part cowboy-Jedi and part covert special forces soldier, Kanan uses his unique skills to gather intelligence, free prisoners of war, procure supplies, extract defectors, and sabotage Imperial war efforts.

Embodied in Kanan's attempts to avoid the public, high-noon showdown is also a commitment to multilateralism. Kanan's narrative arc—from television, to comic book, to novel—includes numerous kinship groups that help him navigate the complicated galactic events of which he finds himself a part. As detailed in the second trade paperback collection of the Kanan comic, *Kanan: First Blood*, the master-apprentice relationship between Master Billaba and Caleb reinforces the idea that connections between individuals help both on their respective life journeys.<sup>30</sup> Likewise, Kanan's relationship with the *Ghost* crew bolsters an underlying thematic concerning deliberation, collaboration, and group decision-making. While each individual on the *Ghost* has a unique backstory and motivation for becoming part of this particular family of choice, they engage in meaningful dialogue regarding what actions to take.

Although Kanan stands as the sole "superpower" in the group, the person who, as a cowboy-Jedi, could take matters into his own hands, he

29 *Star Wars Rebels*, "The Siege of Lothal."

30 *Kanan: First Blood*, written by Greg Weisman, drawn by Pepe Larraz, and colored by David Curiel (New York: Marvel Entertainment, 2015).

respects the decisions of the family. This tendency to work with others also extends to the people Kanan and the crew encounter through their travels. For example, in “The Protector of Concord Dawn,” Kanan attempts to negotiate a covert shipping route through Mandalorian controlled territory.<sup>31</sup> Despite the Mandalorians’ reputation as a warrior people who resolve conflicts through violence, Kanan insists on trying to negotiate a non-violent solution. At various moments throughout the series, Kanan and his crew ally themselves with space pirates, smugglers, Imperial officers, and even a former Sith Lord. My point here is that Kanan’s portrayal as a space cowboy who manages to keep his blaster holstered—at least some of the time—complements a central tenet of the Obama Doctrine’s foreign policy logic: there are times when diplomacy might be a better alternative than violence.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, Kanan’s characterization as a pragmatic humanitarian also coincides with the ideals that comprise the Obama Doctrine. Even though warfare is obviously a central theme in the Star Wars universe, Kanan’s storyline unfolds during a period of military occupation and resistance rather than one of full-scale military conflict. The Galactic Civil War of Kanan’s youth ended with the collapse of the Republic and the subsequent rise of the Galactic Empire. So, while stormtroopers march in the streets and Star Destroyers patrol the skies, the real conflict in *Rebels* is the constant fight to help those in need. The opening minutes of the *Rebels* television movie premiere, *Spark of Rebellion*, introduces Kanan as a speeder bike-riding gunslinger who robs from the Empire and gives to the poor.<sup>33</sup> The need to help others, whether taking in an orphaned street kid to train as a Jedi padawan, tracking down Force-sensitive infants in order to protect them from the Emperor, or making an attempt to run much-needed foodstuffs through an Imperial blockade, is reiterated time and again as Kanan’s primary purpose. Unable to liberate the dusty town streets from the clutches

31 *Star Wars Rebels*, “The Protector of Concord Dawn,” season 2, episode 13, directed by Brad Rau and written by Henry Gilroy and Kevin Hopps, Disney XD, January 27, 2016.

32 At the same time, it is also important to note here that reaching out to others does not always work. A diplomatic solution might be rejected (as was the case in “The Protector of Concord Dawn”) or an uneasy alliance might fail and do more harm than good (the former Sith Darth Maul, for example, turns on his *Ghost*-crew allies and permanently blinds Kanan). These moments underscore, as President Obama made clear in the aforementioned quotation, that the galaxy “is a tough, complicated, messy, mean place, and full of hardship and tragedy.”

33 *Star Wars Rebels: Spark of Rebellion*, directed by Steward Lee and Steven G. Lee and written by Simon Kinberg, Disney XD, October 3, 2014.

of the black-hatted villain, Kanan devotes his life to alleviating the suffering of others. Although his order is extinct, he continues to serve like a Jedi.

In spite of his commitment to assisting others, an underlying tension runs throughout the series: even with all his Jedi powers, Kanan cannot save everyone. A conversation between Kanan and Ezra captures the idea that actions in the *Rebels* universe, like actions in Obama's global community, remain complicated. When Kanan and company come to the attention of the Empire and raze a refugee camp in retaliation, a subdued Kanan explains, "There's a cost to any action we take now, Ezra."<sup>34</sup> As the long-term consequences of US foreign policy suggest—for example, the rise of ISIL, the humanitarian disaster in Aleppo, and a resurgent Taliban—Kanan's observations resonate with the long-term effects of post-9/11 US foreign policy.

Trading his six-shooter for a blaster, his horse for a speeder bike, and his Stetson hat for a ponytail, Kanan Jarrus calls viewers to engage both the contemporary visual representation of the cowboy and the historical Western mythos long married to US political culture since the late nineteenth century. As a character embodying the honesty, self-reliance, and justice associated with his mythic counterpart, but also reverberating with Obama's prudent, multilateral, and humanitarian foreign policy rhetoric, Kanan emerges as a site of active, transmedial myth-making. With one boot in the culturally and politically familiar themes of the frontier mythos, and the other in the pragmatic foreign policy decisions of the Obama presidency, Kanan's narrative arc—as he moves from wayward youth to aimless drifter to principled hero—reconceptualizes the cowboy, changing him from the lone purveyor of justice who shoots first and asks questions later into a prudent negotiator who cooperates with others, thinks before acting, and carefully weighs the costs of military solutions. As his story unfolds across television, comics, and prose fiction, Kanan Jarrus emerges as a reinvigorated space cowboy who provides the opportunity to interrogate the cultural tensions between a war-weary public and the national responsibility to watch over the global frontier.

34 "The Siege of Lothal," *Star Wars Rebels*.

## 17. The Kiss Goodnight from a Galaxy Far, Far Away

Experiencing Star Wars as a Fan-Scholar on Disney Property

*Heather Urbanski*

While scholars have examined what can be labeled transmedia tourism or destination fandom in relation to texts such as the BBC's *Sherlock* and *Twilight*,<sup>1</sup> satisfying the fan impulse to visit the galaxy far, far away is more complicated. *Star Tours*, the franchise's signature attraction at the Disney Parks, has embodied experiential fandom since 1987, with its spaceport terminal queue area and exhibit narrative of a thriving space tourism company. Tied into Disney's relaunch of the Star Wars franchise with *The Force Awakens*, the Disney Parks have kicked into high gear to expand opportunities for guests to experience the saga, particularly at Hollywood Studios in Orlando.

Disney Parks are not the only venues creating Star Wars experiences. In her analysis of original qualitative data gathered from fan-attendees at two London-based Star Wars "immersive attractions," Emma Pett highlights that "the appeal of event-led cinema and interactive media is cross-generational and demographically diverse—and perhaps more closely linked to established fan loyalties than to the appeal of the immersive experience in and of itself."<sup>2</sup> Pett discusses, for example, Secret Cinema's staging of *The Empire Strikes Back*, which included a nightclub replica of the Mos Eisley cantina where attendees were assigned identities and missions, and interacted freely with costumed character actors. Pett describes the event as one "designed to downplay the mainstream branding of the franchise, and accentuate,

1 See, for example, Stijn Reijnders, "Stalking the Count: Dracula, Fandom, and Tourism," *Annals of Tourism Research* 38 (2011); Christine Lundberg and Maria Lexhagen, "Bitten by the *Twilight* Saga," in *Contemporary Tourist Experience: Concepts and Consequences*, ed. by Richard Sharpley and Philip R. Stone (New York: Routledge, 2012); and Christina Lee, "Welcome to London: Spectral Spaces in Sherlock Holmes's Metropolis," *Cultural Studies Review* 20, no. 2 (2014).

2 Emma Pett, "'Stay Disconnected': Eventising *Star Wars* for Transmedia Audiences," *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies* 13 (2016): 153.

via immersive roleplay, the potential for fans to display subcultural capital and being ‘in the know.’”<sup>3</sup>

My position “in the know” of both the Disney and Star Wars fan communities, influenced by my identity as what Henry Jenkins calls an aca-fan,<sup>4</sup> is a deeply personal, affective one, as many of my experiences involved attending events with family. Family and aca-fandom have combined for years through such experiences as the (now discontinued) Star Wars Weekends from 1999 through 2015,<sup>5</sup> the *Last Tour to Endor* party in 2010, and the runDisney Inaugural Dark Side Challenge Race Weekend in 2016—all hosted at Walt Disney World in Orlando. My first costume for WorldCon was a Jedi robe, my niece and nephew wore custom costumes (designed and created by my mother) for the *Last Tour to Endor*, and I have traveled hundreds of miles the past two years just to see the new Star Wars film on opening night with my sister and her children.

My triple identity as Disney fan, Star Wars fan, and popular-culture scholar provides me with a distinctive vantage point for considering the fan dynamics and subcultures on display at the Disney Parks. Where other chapters in this collection examine the many mediations of the Star Wars saga over the past 40 years, the reflections in this chapter are much more personal in nature. Still, as a scholar who embraces the aca-fan label, these personal reflections are processed through an analytical lens, leading me to identify and question the tensions at play between inclusivity and gatekeeping within Star Wars fandom experiences.

In this chapter, I compare my experiences and perspectives on Star Wars fandom with the intentionally and expressly exclusive Secret Cinema event described by Pett. Engagement and immersion within the Star Wars franchise, as I have experienced it in the Disney Parks, offers a stark contrast with other fandom experiences, such as Secret Cinema and San Diego Comic-Con. Rather than appealing to the more exclusive tendencies of fandom, Disney Parks explicitly welcome fans with any level of experience with the franchise, no matter how “original” or new that experience might be. It is difficult to imagine anything more mainstream than the Walt Disney Corporation, and recent changes and additions to the Star Wars

3 Pett, “Stay Disconnected,” 158.

4 Henry Jenkins, “How to Break Out of the Academic Ghetto,” *Confessions of an Aca-Fan*, July 12, 2006, accessed May 15, 2017, [http://henryjenkins.org/2006/07/how\\_to\\_break\\_out\\_of\\_the\\_academ.html](http://henryjenkins.org/2006/07/how_to_break_out_of_the_academ.html).

5 For example, at the second Star Wars Weekend in 2000, I won the trivia contest held in what was then called Disney-MGM Studios. Several cast members expressed surprise that “a girl” was still left in the final rounds.



experience in the Disney Parks reflect what I see as a purposefully open embrace of that broadly communal experience.

## A Brief History of Star Wars in the Disney Parks

Despite vocal negative fan reaction to the Walt Disney Company's purchase of Lucasfilm in 2012, the Disney Parks have maintained a licensed relationship with Lucasfilm for decades. The first Lucasfilm-Disney Parks collaboration produced the 3D film *Captain EO*, which premiered in 1986, followed the next year by *Star Tours*, a motion-simulator attraction with a Lucasfilm-produced Star Wars video and storyline.<sup>6</sup>

I experienced Star Wars in the Disney Parks (almost exclusively in Walt Disney World) for more than a decade before joining organized fandom with the 2001 World Science Fiction Convention in Philadelphia. The online "flame wars" on sites like *TheForce.net* when *The Phantom Menace* was released left me with a profound distaste for online Star Wars fandom. Of course, toxic fan practices, like gatekeeping to only allow in "true" fans, hurling heavily gendered insults, and creating an unwelcoming environment for anyone who does not identify as white, cis-gendered, straight, and male, also appear at real-life events. Such toxicity was especially noticeable during the *Last Tour to Endor* party in August 2010 at Disney's Hollywood Studios; not because it was the first time I encountered it, but because it was the first time I was not attending a fandom event solo. That year, I convinced my parents, my sister, her husband, and their young children to attend with me. Seeing the toxic behavior through the lens of how my mother or seven-year-old niece were treated was eye-opening. Clashes regarding acceptable decorum while children are present, particularly the use of expletives, persisted throughout the several hours at the *Last Tour* party.

While hours-long queuing is common at conventions such as San Diego Comic-Con and even the Star Wars Celebration (with which the *Last Tour* party was affiliated), this is not the case at Disney Parks such as Hollywood Studios. The elaborate Disney ride queues are designed to be part of the story, are nearly always indoors, and are permanent fixtures intended to accommodate all but the largest of holiday crowds (such as on New Year's Eve or the Fourth of July). Similarly, a FastPass system has been in place for nearly two decades to reduce waiting time. This is the Disney Parks ethos

6 As I write this, the first pictures of the construction of new Star Wars Lands at both Walt Disney World and Disneyland are being promoted ahead of the 2019 opening dates.



I was accustomed to and expected to be in force at the *Last Tour to Endor* party. Unfortunately, because of this ethos, Hollywood Studios was not equipped to deal with the massive crowds of Star Wars fans that night, for whom standing in a queue for hours was not unexpected. This clash of fan ethos led to overcrowding on a hot and humid August night, heated tempers, and the abusive language that all too often follows such strained conditions. As the release of *The Force Awakens* approached, however, the story-first ethos of Disney became central again to the Disney Parks experiences, making 2016 the start of what feels like a new chapter for Star Wars fandom.

My own 2016 adventures started on the *Disney Fantasy*, one of the ships in the Disney Cruise Line, with its inaugural Star Wars Day at Sea cruise in January. On the event day, many passengers wandered around decks in full cosplay, while most sported branded t-shirts and hats. Tusken Raiders wandered the Atrium, interacting with passengers while *Rebels* episodes played continuously on FunnelVision, the huge screen overlooking the family pool. That screen participated in the storytelling with a video of an Imperial officer warning of Rebel infiltration, after which point stormtroopers dispersed among the crowd. The ship's horn, which typically cycles between seven iconic Disney tunes, instead played the "Imperial March" several times during the day.

The day was capped off by a fireworks show that opened with the introductory crawl from *A New Hope* on the FunnelVision screen. The performance felt very similar to the 2009 *Star Wars in Concert* event I attended in Philadelphia, built around clip montages assembled along similar themes to match the music (like "Duel of the Fates" synced to lightsaber battles from the various films), with the addition of costumed actors posing on stage. Scenes from *Rebels* were included in the fireworks show, as were clips from all seven films, though scenes from *The Force Awakens* were used sparingly since the film had opened less than a month before. When the attention shifted to the fireworks themselves, additional touches, such as Vader's breathing added to the "Imperial March," completed the experience.

Several months later, in April 2016, came the inaugural Star Wars: Half Marathon—The Dark Side experience, a race weekend that included a 5K, 10K, and half-marathon, plus the option to complete the Dark Side Challenge (both the 10K and half-marathon on consecutive days). My entire family competed in at least one race and I could not pass up the chance for race medals in the shape of the Death Star and TIE fighters. While we were waiting in the corrals with thousands of other runners to begin the half-marathon, Star Wars references were everywhere, including the announcer's constant reminders of the scene in *The Force Awakens* where Finn and Rey tell themselves "I can do this" as they escape from Jakku. Large screens also

showed original trilogy trailers while we were waiting, making for a nostalgic trip back in time, as well as frequent laughs at the now-dated visual effects on display.

In her article, Pett reflects on her own experience attending the Secret Cinema event, where she “was conscious of [her] cultural competences as a fan being manipulated as a consumer of a high-end immersive event; however this awareness did not detract from my enjoyment of the experience.”<sup>7</sup> I, too, shared Pett’s dual perspective during my trips to the Disney Parks in July and November 2016. I felt chills throughout each performance of the Star Wars-themed nighttime fireworks, laser, and music show in Hollywood Studios, the *Galactic Spectacular*. This show is clearly designed to hit on fan loyalties and “sweet spots” with lines not only from the films but also from the trailer of *The Force Awakens*. For example, when Maz asks, “Who are you?” and Rey answers, “I’m no one,” the moment is made to fit seamlessly alongside classic lines such as “Never tell me the odds” and “I love you”/“I know” split across the two side screens, with Leia on the right and Han on the left. Yet in contrast to the Secret Cinema event, this “manipulation” of my cultural competence was open to all park guests, included in the price of park admission, essentially the opposite of the “high-end immersive event” Pett describes.<sup>8</sup> This contrast strikes me as the most critical element of the Star Wars experiences in the Disney Parks.

Pett’s analysis of Secret Cinema’s *The Empire Strikes Back* event concludes that such events “are designed to downplay the mainstream branding of the franchise, and accentuate, via immersive roleplay, the potential for fans to display subcultural capital and being ‘in the know.’”<sup>9</sup> This “veil of exclusivity” is inextricable, according to Pett, from the “economic practices [that] generate consumer pleasure for those initiated and ‘in the know,’”<sup>10</sup> and relates, in my mind, to the toxic fan behaviors that have similar roots in the protection of subcultural capital from mainstream audiences. The gatekeeping in these events can be fairly literal, as in the secret passwords for the Secret Cinema nightclub, or more informal, as in the “quizzes” many fans (particularly non-white men) encounter when entering a fandom space like San Diego Comic-Con or an online forum; it is nearly impossible to miss once one knows what to look for.

7 Pett, “Stay Disconnected,” 159.

8 Pett, “Stay Disconnected,” 159.

9 Pett, “Stay Disconnected,” 158.

10 Pett, “Stay Disconnected,” 158.

Such exclusivity stands in sharp contrast with the (relatively) open invitation to all park guests to experience and enact Star Wars fandom. Recent additions to the Star Wars experience in the Disney Parks even represent a change from previous fandom events in those spaces, such as Star Wars Weekends, which, in later years, had become an exercise in queuing, special access for an extra fee, and long lines for autograph sessions. Starting in 2016, however, Disney Parks returned to centering fan-guest engagement around the Star Wars story, as opposed to limited-edition merchandise, ticketed events, and celebrity encounters. This approach was more consistent with the Disney Parks ethos of immersing guests in the story of an attraction or experience, like the long-time fan favorite *Pirates of the Caribbean*. Such immersion is a hallmark of Disney Parks that separates it from other amusement parks like Six Flags or Seaworld, where the rides and attractions are more disparate and disconnected.

Of course, as Pett mentions by referencing Thomas Austin's work, we cannot ignore the economic realities of such fandom practices, and I certainly acknowledge that attending the Disney Parks is not cheap. Therefore, participating in supposedly "free" events and experiences still requires substantial economic privilege, but, even with this caveat, Disney Park immersive events and attractions do reflect a more inclusive approach than those described by Pett and by myself at more specialized events like Comic-Con and Star Wars Celebration.

## New Era of Star Wars in the Disney Parks

The sale of Lucasfilm to Disney marked the beginning of a new Star Wars era. The release of *The Force Awakens* in December 2015 led to a remarkable year for Star Wars at the Disney Parks, where fans immersed themselves further in the story. While 2016 included new experiences like those described above, the bulk of the new Star Wars attractions at Disney are located in Hollywood Studios, where the classic *Star Tours* ride (relaunched in 2011) was updated with scenes of Finn and BB-8 after *The Force Awakens* opened. Approaching *Star Tours* as part of the transmedia Star Wars experience requires seeing the attraction as both a film and a ride, along with an immersive spatial location for fans that fits the Disney Parks' "story first" emphasis neatly.<sup>11</sup> The *Star Tours* queue area is designed as a space terminal

11 Other attractions at Disney Parks, Space Mountain in Disneyland and Rock 'n' Roller Coaster in Hollywood Studios, also received "overlays" temporarily turning them into Star

for a travel service, complete with commercials for such destinations as Naboo and Endor, and is filled with its own self-referential nods as well, such as the droid pilot from the previous version of the ride, Rex, who is seen in a shipping container.

Pett references Alison Griffiths's work "on ways in which audience mobility within the viewing space is a key factor shaping the immersive experience" as part of her own analysis of the "mobile, participatory environment and the various pleasures this facilitates."<sup>12</sup> Such mobility is a key element of fun for guests who engage with the wandering Jawas and stormtroopers both on the cruise ship and at Hollywood Studios. In that park, the combination exhibit and attraction *Launch Bay* is designed for and around audience mobility, including the artwork in the queue. That queue is decorated with so many reproductions of original concept art that a long wait time is made much more bearable. Inside the exhibit, fans wander among props behind glass, have their picture taken with characters such as Chewbacca and Darth Vader, and play Star Wars video games on consoles set up along a wall. And of course, there is also a gift shop where ultra-expensive collector's items are sold alongside less exclusive merchandise such as books, plush toys, and custom phone cases.

The experiences, however, are not limited to just the permanent locations of *Star Tours* and *Launch Bay*. For example, we were stopped near the entrance to Hollywood Studios in November 2016 to let Captain Phasma and a squad of First Order stormtroopers make their way up Hollywood Boulevard toward the stage for one of their many daily appearances to warn against the Resistance. My family and I joined dozens of other guests behind the squad, marching along to John Williams's score from *The Force Awakens* toward the stage, with its backdrop projection of the First Order insignia. The cross-generational aspect of these events was on full display, my view partially blocked by young kids on adult shoulders so they could see better. Once on stage, Phasma addressed the crowd as if we were stormtroopers: "I am here under the authority of General Hux. You are here under the authority of me. Stand proud. Troops in this division are held to the highest standard: mine." The performance ended with the warning, "We do not tolerate traitors, nor those who hide them," before the entire group marched to *Launch Bay*.

The most remarkable 2016 addition, though, was the new nighttime show, the *Galactic Spectacular*. While a more passive than interactive experience,

Wars attractions.

<sup>12</sup> Pett, "Stay Disconnected," 154.

it clearly fits with Pett's conclusions that such events are "cross-generational and demographically diverse" and "closely linked to established fan loyalties."<sup>13</sup> As fans, we were given the chance to re-experience the Star Wars story in a different space and across different media, without attempts to retell the story in a cohesive way. It is also the communal event in the parks that invokes the most varied media, which is likely why I am personally so impressed by the experience of music, fireworks, and images from the saga together with hundreds of other guests.

Pett places this kind of immersive experience within a long "history of moving image narratives and storytelling techniques," interpreting its history "as a series of technological advancements in the quest to create the perfect illusion of an all-encompassing fictional space."<sup>14</sup> The multi-sensory elements of the *Galactic Spectacular* at Disney's Hollywood Studios work in much the same way, with heat from flames coming out of the top of the theater (at three moments in the show); the iconic sound of Vader breathing synchronized with rising and lowering red lights; Force lightning flowing from the screen to lights in the trees; lasers timed to sounds and images of X-wings, TIE fighters, and blaster fire; and actual fog supplementing the Yoda segment on Dagobah.

This long quest for cinematic immersion also has a history in amusement parks with "historical para-cinematic sites of amusement, such as Coney Island and the Berlin Lunapark" being events that "gave early filmgoers the opportunity to engage with the new medium of the moving image within a space which was primarily designated for an interactive audience experience, often on an impermanent basis."<sup>15</sup> This fits very well with the perpetually changing offerings at Disney's Hollywood Studios and the Disney Cruise Line events offered in 2016 and 2017. Its impermanent basis was particularly noticeable with the *Galactic Spectacular*, as new elements were often added literally overnight, so that guests watching the show at the end of one day could see a modified version the next. Pett sees such immersive attractions as a "communal experience" and investigates "what [immersion] offers to the event participants."<sup>16</sup> Considering the *Galactic Spectacular* as a communal experience, I am reminded of the excitement in seeing a montage of iconic moments and dialogue from all three periods in the Star Wars saga along with the intensely familiar John Williams music

13 Pett, "Stay Disconnected," 153.

14 Pett, "Stay Disconnected," 153.

15 Pett, "Stay Disconnected," 154.

16 Pett, "Stay Disconnected," 156.

and Disney Parks fireworks—known among cast members as the “Kiss Goodnight.”

Pett specifically mentions “the heavily branded Star Wars at Madame Tussauds and Legoland’s Star Wars Event Days,” describing them as “marketed for a broad, family-oriented demographic, extending existing consumer loyalty across new, transmedial spaces.”<sup>17</sup> And in the auto-ethnographic section of her analysis, Pett describes her experience at the wax museum’s event as “uncomfortable and not particularly enjoyable” because

the overcrowded “mainstream” environment of Madame Tussauds merely facilitated agitation and an overall sense of the inauthentic. Furthermore, whereas the Secret Cinema participants were predominantly middle class, or more likely to be in possession of disposable income, visitors to Madame Tussauds were more obviously tourists, which grated on my sense of identity as a London resident.<sup>18</sup>

When I compare this characterization to my own aca-fan experiences at the Disney Parks, I imagine that those who share Pett’s preferences would also find *Launch Bay* and the *Galactic Spectacular* to be insufficiently authentic. From my perspective, however, enacting Star Wars fandom in the Disney Parks feels decidedly more open and welcoming when compared to events where tests of subcultural capital and an intentional non-mainstream vibe are invoked.

Another aspect of the mainstream events Pett critiques is the commercial nature of twenty-first-century franchises (something particularly on display in the Disney Parks experience). Much fandom scholarship expresses frustrations that fan enthusiasm is manipulated for profit. My position as a member of this shared Disney Parks/Star Wars community complicates those conventional critiques. Rather than feeling manipulated against my will, or treated only as a profit center, I do also see the merchandise available in the parks as souvenirs of family time spent on vacation and a way to identify myself to fellow fans. Similarly, such “official” merchandise often marks a particular trip to the Disney Parks, either with a year on the item itself or just a specific memory attached to it (such as the BB-8 ears my niece bought me after I had struggled to complete the runDisney Dark Side Challenge), while also not requiring fans to be able to construct their own handcrafted items that often carry more prestige in fandom circles.

17 Pett, “Stay Disconnected,” 153.

18 Pett, “Stay Disconnected,” 159.

In their editorial overview to a special issue of *Transformative Works and Cultures*, Lucy Bennett and Paul J. Booth observe that “performance is an integral part of fandom and fannish experiences.”<sup>19</sup> While Bennett and Booth acknowledge that “visible and overt” performances such as cosplay are most often viewed by popular culture as “‘true’ (or, at least, the most explicit) fannish performances,” they also advocate for a more expansive view of fan performance that “often goes beneath the surface.”<sup>20</sup> In my own Disney Parks observations, the in-person fan performances range from full-on cosplay (though recent security rules restrict this to guests under the age of fourteen) to more subtle displays of iconic images, such as my Alex and Ani bracelet collection. I particularly prize objects that allow me to express both fandoms at once, such as the water bottle I often carry with me to class, commemorating the relaunch of *Star Tours* in 2011.

Bennett and Booth recommend that we view fandom through the lens of performance, as “artificial enactments permeated by meaning,” and behavior through rituals “of consumption, viewership, collecting, conspicuous consumption, and even overt emotional display (squee!).”<sup>21</sup> The Disney Parks, with their focus on story-based experiences enacted by cast members for and with guests, is a space for fandom performances of many kinds, displaying John Fiske’s “enunciative productivity” across franchise and intellectual property. This classic concept is described by Matt Hills as “characterising meanings that are shared or spoken in face-to-face culture,”<sup>22</sup> though Fiske’s own description is clear that production extends beyond text or speech to also include the “styling of hair or make-up, the choice of clothes or accessories [as] ways of constructing a social identity and therefore of asserting one’s membership of a particular fan community.”<sup>23</sup>

An incomplete list of such enunciative productivity from my November 2016 trip to Walt Disney World includes watching a young boy in Epcot, wearing a full sweatsuit-like stormtrooper costume and dancing to an Irish jig in the United Kingdom pavilion, just steps away from where Alice and Mary Poppins make their daily appearances. Meanwhile, the crowd gathering for the November 5 performance of the *Galactic Spectacular* was

19 Lucy Bennett and Paul J. Booth, “Performance and Performativity in Fandom,” *Transformative Works and Cultures* 18 (2015), doi:10.3983/twc.2015.0675.

20 Bennett and Booth, “Performance and Performativity.”

21 Bennett and Booth, “Performance and Performativity.”

22 Matt Hills, “Fiske’s ‘Textual Productivity’ and Digital Fandom: Web 2.0 Democratization versus Fan Distinction?” *Participations: Journal of Audience and Reception Studies* 10 (2013): 132.

23 John Fiske, “The Cultural Economy of Fandom,” in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, ed. Lisa A. Lewis (London: Routledge, 1992), 38.



full of guests “asserting” their fandom membership. I counted at least three young girls in Rey costumes, dozens of light-up ears showing the Death Star, X-wings, and TIE fighters in battle, more than ten BB-8 and R2-D2 ears on adults and children, not to mention dozens of lightsabers. And all around us were opportunities to purchase park-specific merchandise, such as popcorn buckets in the shape of Han Solo in carbonite and commemorative BB-8 cups. In this communal space, open to all park guests, clothing and other objects (most “officially” licensed, but some homemade) contributed to what Fiske describes as the “generation and circulation of certain meanings of the object of fandom within a local community.”<sup>24</sup> The community as constituted that night was local and short-lived, yet the “established fan loyalties” described by Pett formed the basis for our experiences that evening.<sup>25</sup>

While the Secret Cinema event Pett analyzes and the Disney Parks Star Wars experiences are clearly very different, fans attending either seem to reflect Pett’s observation that “pre-existing fandom of the Star Wars franchise played a significant role in their experiences of the event, offering them a ready-made sense of communality that outlived the duration of the evening’s entertainment.”<sup>26</sup> For example, as I was on my way back to my hotel on November 5, 2016, I overheard the conversation of the family in front of me. The daughter said, “Look at the moon!” to which her father replied, “That’s no moon. That’s a space station.” Light laughter spread through the crowd as the “official” part of the Disney Parks experience came to an end, while the communal experience continued just a little bit longer.

24 Fiske, “Cultural Economy of Fandom,” 38.

25 Pett, “Stay Disconnected,” 153.

26 Pett, “Stay Disconnected,” 164.





## 18. Formatting Nostalgia

### IMAX Expansions of the Star Wars Franchise

*Allison Whitney*

On July 8, 2014, J.J. Abrams's production company, Bad Robot, released a tweet with an image of an IMAX camera suspended over a desert landscape, with the hashtag #bestformatever.<sup>1</sup> At this point in time, the company had released only a few oblique details about the production of *The Force Awakens*; while it was not immediately clear if they were shooting the film in this format, the image inspired speculation about how the much-anticipated Star Wars film might be enhanced by the experience of IMAX. However, this was not the first intersection of Star Wars and IMAX. In this essay, I will address how IMAX iterations of three Star Wars films draw upon viewers' transmedia experiences with and nostalgia for the franchise.

The 1996 documentary *Special Effects: Anything Can Happen*, directed by Star Wars sound designer Ben Burtt, features a recreation of the opening sequence of *A New Hope* in IMAX format. Using IMAX's unique discourse of science documentary and sensory immersion, the recreation offers viewers a simulation of the theatrical awe that is central to Star Wars's place in popular history. Six years later, *Attack of the Clones* was among the first films to be reformatted for IMAX exhibition using the DMR (digital remastering) process. The IMAX version invited and magnified comparisons among and debates about the relative merits of digital and analog formats. While many twenty-first-century films have engaged in such discourse, Star Wars's decades-long rhetoric of technological innovation and cinematic nostalgia made *Attack of the Clones*'s use of IMAX particularly interesting. Finally, *The Force Awakens* includes a sequence shot with IMAX cameras, a fact that played a key role in the film's promotional rhetoric by emphasizing its faithfulness to pre-digital filmmaking practices. These three applications of IMAX technologies offer illuminating case studies for how Star Wars's transmedia manifestations cultivate viewer sensitivity to the aesthetics and phenomenology of particular film formats and subsequently align those formats with nostalgic sentiment.

<sup>1</sup> Bad Robot (@BadRobot), Twitter post, July 8, 2014, 2:51 p.m. [https://twitter.com/bad\\_robot/status/486628757780721664](https://twitter.com/bad_robot/status/486628757780721664).

Before I go any further, I must acknowledge the complexity of defining IMAX, a term that refers simultaneously to a corporate entity, several exhibition formats and systems, camera technology, and a film format. The founders of IMAX invented a 15/70 film system, which means 70mm film (65mm negative) with fifteen perforations per frame (standard 70mm has five perforations). This is the largest film format in use, widely referred to as IMAX film. On the exhibition side, the IMAX brand covers several types of projection systems and theater designs. Historically, flat-screen IMAX involved screens between six and eight stories in height, with an aspect ratio of 1.43:1. These theatres are now referred to as IMAX GT (Grand Theater), the first permanent facility of which was built in 1971. 1973 saw the beginnings of IMAX Dome, also called OMNIMAX, where the image is projected into a dome and fills the audience's field of vision. A 3D system was introduced in the mid-1980s. For the first 30 years of IMAX history, the majority of its cinemas were in museums, science centers, or at tourist sites, but, in the late 1990s, after a change in ownership, the company began to expand into other venues, introducing a smaller-screen design in 2003 termed MPX. In 2008, they debuted the 4K IMAX Digital projector and, in 2015, they introduced IMAX Laser, a digital system that most closely approximates the look of 70mm film.<sup>2</sup>

While each exhibition system creates distinct experiences, IMAX offers extreme sensory engagement, a rhetoric of immersive and participatory media, a feeling of "being in the picture," and a mode of cinema that is emphatically theatrical, in that it is impossible to recreate the geometry of IMAX in a home theater system. In this chapter, I discuss how these concepts inform each of the IMAX Star Wars films, encouraging viewers to consciously compare IMAX's properties to other formats, and to contemplate how format informs their engagements with the text. Furthermore, I consider how IMAX plays into the relationship between innovation and nostalgia, both in the films themselves and in their promotion and reception.

2 To complicate matters further, companies besides IMAX use 15/70 film and there are now competing digital projection systems that boast similarly large screens and high definition. Given that the films I discuss were produced in cooperation with the IMAX Corporation, it seems fair to use the term IMAX. Furthermore, there is now an IMAX digital camera, but it was not used for the titles I discuss here.

## *Special Effects*

*Special Effects* is a documentary that traces the history of cinematic illusions, explores the science behind effects' manipulation of perception, and features an homage to King Kong, as well as behind-the-scenes footage from the sets of *Independence Day*, *Jumanji*, *Kazaam*, and the 1997 original Star Wars trilogy special edition, including IMAX-format recreations of scenes from *A New Hope*. The special-edition production footage included scenes of stormtroopers on Tatooine, a visit to Lucasfilm to examine props and puppets from the original trilogy, and discussion of new innovations in digital effects that would appear in the forthcoming films. *Special Effects* not only cultivates interest in the special editions, but it also offers what we might regard as a series of historical reenactments. By demonstrating how they recreate the special effects for the IMAX version of *A New Hope*, the filmmakers essentially reenact the original film's production—they resurrect the physical objects, such as the spaceship models from the Lucasfilm archive, and the filmmaking techniques in order to rehearse the 1970s processes, all the while contemplating how IMAX cameras and digital tools offer new challenges and possibilities. The final product of these sequences is then shown to the audience, offering yet another kind of reenactment, as the experience of watching *A New Hope* is reproduced in a theatrical setting.

On the surface, the opening space battle from *A New Hope* is a practical choice for IMAX recreation because it does not require actors or narrative set-up for unfamiliar viewers, but it also taps into popular narratives of spectatorship about this specific moment in the film. Indeed, many people who viewed *A New Hope* during its initial run describe the shot of the Star Destroyer flying overhead as transformative, not only for their engagement with the movie, but also for their understanding of cinema and its possibilities. For example, in "Zooming Out: The End of Offscreen Space," Scott Bukatman begins his essay with "You remember the shot [...] I'm sure you do," then goes on to describe the opening of *A New Hope* in the knowledge that any reader interested in an essay on special effects will recall how in that shot "new cinematic technologies redefined space, displaced narrative, and moved cinema into a revived realm of spectacular excess."<sup>3</sup>

When presented in IMAX, the scene's capacity to create visceral thrills and disorientation, while challenging traditional notions of perspective,

3 Scott Bukatman, "Zooming Out: The End of Offscreen Space," in *The New American Cinema*, ed. Jon Lewis (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 248.

landscape, and mise-en-scène, calls upon viewers' memories of the text and of the material properties of the formats in which they have seen it. It allowed younger viewers who might only know Star Wars from VHS, but whose cinematic sensibilities had been shaped by the subsequent developments in special effects, to comprehend the awe of the original. At the same time, it allowed seasoned viewers to revisit the nostalgic pleasure of theatrical viewing, all the while positioning that experience within IMAX's unique discourse of sensory immersion. *Special Effects* thus attempted a simulation of the theatrical experience that is central to Star Wars's place in popular history.

In order to pull off this simulation, the filmmakers had to combine historical techniques with the newest technologies. Visual effects supervisor Bruce Nicholson "planned to film the original models and matte paintings with a motion controlled 15perf/65mm camera, scan the original negative, and composite the elements digitally."<sup>4</sup> Yet, as they worked on the project, they realized that the distinct features of IMAX film, specifically the frame's relationship to the viewer's field of vision and the high-definition image, complicated the illusion. First, the large size of the IMAX camera changed its spatial relationship to the models, so, instead of the five-foot-long Star Destroyer model from *A New Hope*, they had to use the eight-foot one from *The Empire Strikes Back* to create a comparable effect.<sup>5</sup> Further, as the Star Destroyer flies overhead, Burttt allowed it to enter further into the frame than in the original film. In the IMAX facilities operating in the 1990s, the frame would approach, or even extend beyond the audience's field of vision, and therefore Burttt realized that the object's relationship to the frame had to change accordingly. They also had to adapt the sound for the IMAX system; Nicholson notes that they took great pains to create "an exposure sheet timing the rhythm of the laserblasts" so that they would match the audience's memories of not only the sound effects but the precise details of their pacing.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, the high-definition quality of IMAX 70mm film and the fact that there were no wide-angle lenses for IMAX cameras complicated the standard miniature techniques, where filmmakers manipulate depth of field to exaggerate space and depth. They addressed some of these concerns by using larger models, but these presented more challenges in turn, as their higher level of detail, which "everyone agreed was necessary

4 Kelly Tyler, "The Making of *Special Effects*," *The Big Frame*, Summer 1996, 34.

5 Ron Magid, "Amazing *Special Effects*," *American Cinematographer*, August 1996, 34.

6 Magid, "Amazing *Special Effects*," 36.

for large-format, actually worked against the realism of the shot,” to the extent that they ended up dusting the models with powder to reduce their sharpness.<sup>7</sup> Burt explains that

So much of special effects is Impressionism [...] but creating impressions for such a huge screen is much harder. Our images were subject to such magnification and sharpness that we feared audiences would suddenly become aware of the imperfections. The medium asks us to see things—even special effects—for what they really are, and that’s tough.<sup>8</sup>

Indeed, one of the reasons that IMAX has been difficult to use for fiction filmmaking is that it picks up levels of detail that would pass notice in 35mm.

This tension between generating photorealistic illusion and educating the viewer about the mechanics of said illusions speaks to a larger dynamic in special-effects cinema. As Bukatman explains, by “emphasizing cinema’s visuality, special effects foreground principles of perception, while their reflexive, presentational quality emphasizes the technologies of their production.”<sup>9</sup> In the context of *Special Effects*, the specific properties of both IMAX film and new digital-effects systems raised questions about shifts in perception and aesthetics by using material that was well-known to the audience but also designed to highlight shifts in standards of photorealism. Susanne Simpson, producer and writer of the documentary, explains how

Movie illusions are becoming increasingly harder to spot for what they are. Digital technology allows us the ability to manipulate images and to recreate almost everything in this world. In the future people will have to be very visually sophisticated to be able to tell what’s real and what isn’t.<sup>10</sup>

Simpson’s call for media literacy is intended to promote the film’s educational qualities to the museum market, but it also suggests that, while the documentary draws upon its audiences’ nostalgic attachments to Star Wars

7 Magid, “Amazing *Special Effects*,” 35.

8 Magid, “Amazing *Special Effects*,” 31.

9 Bukatman, “Zooming Out,” 254.

10 “NOVA Goes Hollywood: An Interview with Susanne Simpson, Producer of *Special Effects*,” *Special Effects* Press Kit, Boston: NOVA/WGBH, 1996.

by valorizing technologies of the past, it also equips its viewers to appreciate, and even question, the digital transformations of the special edition.<sup>11</sup>

### *Attack of the Clones*

In 2002, IMAX introduced DMR, a process for digitally remastering 35mm films for exhibition in the IMAX format. DMR technicians scan the 35mm print, use proprietary software to analyze the image's grain, and extrapolate from it, allowing the image to be blown up to IMAX proportions. The soundtrack is also remastered for the IMAX six-channel system. The first DMR release was Ron Howard's *Apollo 13*, a film chosen for the historical and scientific themes that made it attractive to the museums that housed the majority of IMAX facilities. The second film to undergo the process was *Attack of the Clones*, whose IMAX version was released six months after it first appeared in cinemas. One reason for the delay was that DMR was a time-consuming and labor-intensive process, but the waiting period also had a significant impact on how audiences experienced the film.

The temporal delay meant that Star Wars fans would have already seen *Attack of the Clones*, often multiple times, before seeing the IMAX version. Not only did *Attack of the Clones* have the ubiquity of any Star Wars release, but the promotional campaign had placed a great deal of emphasis on format, as it was the first Star Wars film to be shot entirely with digital cameras (*The Phantom Menace* used both 35mm and HDCAM) and it was shown, with much fanfare, in digital projection. As Richard Grusin explains, *Attack of the Clones*'s digital properties were "heralded in the popular media as marking a watershed moment in the history of film" and were even referenced in the industry as anticipating the end of analog filmmaking.<sup>12</sup> While many filmgoers would have seen the film in 35mm prints, most would also have been acutely aware of its status as a digital text. Given that the audience for the IMAX version would consist of Star Wars fans, who are often highly conscious of even the smallest distinctions among releases and formats, the IMAX version encouraged viewers to contemplate

11 It is worth noting that given IMAX documentaries' long-running engagements and staggered release schedules, *Special Effects* screened in many markets during the theatrical releases of the special-edition films.

12 Richard Grusin, "DVDs, Video Games, and the Cinema of Interactions," in *Post-Cinema: Theorizing 21st Century Film*, eds. Shane Denson and Julia Leyda (Falmer: REFRAME Books, 2016), 65.

how the film's narrative and aesthetic properties, as well as the theatrical experience, were affected by technological change.

*Attack of the Clones* is an interesting artifact of IMAX's early DMR period, in that the reformatting reveals the interactions among technologies. First, they decided to change the aspect ratio, accomplished through a combination of reframing and digital pans, to accommodate a shift from the original 2.35:1 to 1.81:1, which would make better use of the vertical immensity of the IMAX screen. They also edited the film for length. IMAX films' duration had been limited to about 40 minutes due to the size of the projector's platter, but DMR productions required much longer run times. Engineers soon realized that a print over two hours in length was simply too heavy for the rotors to handle, so *Attack of the Clones* had to cut 22 minutes of footage, resulting in significant shifts in narrative, tone, and characterization.<sup>13</sup> Many of the edits minimized expository dialogue, including several scenes with Jar Jar Binks, Obi-Wan's discussion with Jocasta Nu in the Jedi Temple Archives, C-3PO's introduction of Owen and Beru, and Padmé and Anakin's conversation with Queen Jamillia. They also removed or shortened several of the more light-hearted scenes between Anakin and Padmé, including the awkward exchange upon their reintroduction early in the film and the scene in which they frolic in a field on Naboo. Many regarded the edits as an improvement, helping to resolve inconsistencies in characterization and narrative logic, particularly in the Anakin/Padmé dynamics, where the IMAX version of their relationship has a consistently darker tone that foreshadows its anticipated tragic outcome.

Viewers debated the merits of the changes, but many agreed that the "IMAX version winds up being decently similar to fan edits that succeeded it."<sup>14</sup> While fan culture has a long tradition of remixing mainstream texts, fan edits had received considerable attention since the release of *The Phantom Menace*; revisions such as *The Phantom Edit* began to be distributed among fan networks.<sup>15</sup> While it is plausible that many *Attack of the Clones* fan edits were influenced by the IMAX version, it is interesting to think about the

13 Online fan communities made a point of documenting the changes. For example, see "The Definitive IMAX Cut Scenes List," *TheForce.net*, October 31, 2002, accessed May 15, 2017, [http://www.theforce.net/latestnews/story/the\\_definitive\\_imax\\_cut\\_scenes\\_list\\_64801.asp](http://www.theforce.net/latestnews/story/the_definitive_imax_cut_scenes_list_64801.asp).

14 Aluminum Falcon, "Star Wars Episode II—Attack of the Clones (2002): IMAX Cut Reconstruction," *Fanres*, January 11, 2017, accessed May 15, 2017, <https://forum.fanres.com/thread-1243.html>. Fanres.com is a website devoted to fan restorations of films and television programs.

15 Daniel Kraus, "The Phantom Edit," *Salon*, November 5, 2001, accessed May 15, 2017, [http://www.salon.com/2001/11/05/phantom\\_edit/](http://www.salon.com/2001/11/05/phantom_edit/).



DMR transformation as part of a larger phenomenon of Star Wars films' transmedia reconfigurations.

While changes to the narrative had the closest connection to fan remixing of the story, the shift in scale also encouraged a different kind of engagement with the film, one in which viewers were acutely aware of the possibilities and limits of digital cinema. Since the DMR software was designed to analyze film grain, the fact that the images were shot on HDCAM resulted in some digital artifacts such as pixelation, particularly of textures like hair and fabric. At the same time, the large image allowed viewers to better appreciate the film's astonishing efforts at world-building, with digital *mise-en-scène* generating compositions so complex that they invite multiple viewings. Kristen Whissel has discussed this moment in special-effects history when animators began to cultivate "digital multitudes," noting how elaborate crowd scenes demonstrated the possibilities of digital effects to create minute detail and vast diegetic spaces.<sup>16</sup> When screened in IMAX, and especially to viewers who had previously seen *Attack of the Clones* in smaller formats, the film invites its viewers to look around the image and appreciate these details, while also noting how the unique geometry of the IMAX theatre maximizes the film's dramas of scale. For example, a post on *TheForce.net* relays the observations of an IMAX projectionist, who notes that:

this movie is *much* more intimate—you are allowed now to be drawn into the details, of which there are so many that George put in that it's hard to believe! For example, [in a scene on Tatooine] you can see Jawas moving around *inside* the crawler now [...] The background details become functional instead of just being background—he says you'll probably spend more time watching them than anything else, because we've never been able to see them this clearly before!<sup>17</sup>

Viewers also remarked that action and dialogue scenes alike benefitted from the larger screen. For example, the chase sequence on Coruscant became all the more thrilling thanks to IMAX's capacity to create feelings

16 In her essay, Whissel discusses the appearance of the vast Clone Army on Kamino in *Attack of the Clones* as an example of such digital multitudes, noting the common visual connection of multitudes with large spaces. Kristen Whissel, "The Digital Multitude," *Cinema Journal* 49, no. 4 (2010): 97.

17 "AOTC IMAX Cuts and Deletions," *TheForce.net*, October 30, 2002, accessed May 15, 2017, [http://www.theforce.net/latestnews/story/AOTC\\_IMAX\\_Cuts\\_and\\_Deletions\\_64824.asp](http://www.theforce.net/latestnews/story/AOTC_IMAX_Cuts_and_Deletions_64824.asp).

of vertigo, while the immensity of close-ups allowed one to appreciate nuances of actor performances, further enhancing the sense of intimacy.

Each of these observations depends on a combination of factors, including viewers' previous viewings of the film—therefore enabling viewers to take the time to notice changes—and the distinct technologies of IMAX cinemas. It is important to recall that there were very few commercial IMAX venues in 2002, so the experience of seeing a Star Wars movie in a museum or educational institution differentiated it from conventional film spectatorship. With this in mind, it is interesting to note that the poster for *Attack of the Clones: The IMAX Experience* features Yoda wielding his lightsaber below the tagline "Size Matters Not. Except on An IMAX Screen." While most Star Wars posters show characters against a starfield, Yoda here stands above a map of the United States featuring American landmarks, including Seattle's Space Needle, San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge, New York's Empire State Building and Statue of Liberty, Dallas's Reunion Tower, St. Louis's Gateway Arch, and Washington D.C.'s Capitol—all cities that house IMAX theatres. The poster playfully references Yoda's commentary on scale from *The Empire Strikes Back*, but, equally importantly, it identifies this version of the film as a site-specific experience. In the hyper-cinematic spaces of IMAX theatres, viewers were able to access properties of a film that was arguably ahead of its time, with its complex digital multitudes only becoming fully visible on the big screen. Further, if we regard the changes in both narrative and aspect ratio within the larger constellation of *Attack of the Clones's* transmedia manifestations, from novelizations to fan edits, then the IMAX version stands as a valorization of the creative possibilities of Star Wars's continual remixing and recirculation.

### *The Force Awakens*

In the thirteen years between the releases of *Attack of the Clones* and *The Force Awakens*, IMAX underwent substantial transformations in its exhibition infrastructure and its relationship to mainstream filmmaking. There was a significant expansion of the commercial theatre network and the DMR process was refined and streamlined, such that Hollywood productions now routinely have IMAX releases, sometimes featuring footage shot on IMAX film. Fans of the format were often disappointed with these new cinemas, which tended to have smaller screens and lower-resolution

digital projection, decrying them as “fake” or “LieMax.”<sup>18</sup> In contrast, the more traditional GT and Dome facilities—particularly those that retained their 15/70 projection systems—came to represent notions of authenticity and principled cinephilia, in no small part thanks to filmmakers like Christopher Nolan, who makes a point of eschewing digital cameras and valorizing the IMAX 15/70 versions of his films as the most authentic to his vision.<sup>19</sup> By 2015, IMAX 15/70 had become a reference point for the value of film in a digital age and it is in this context that *The Force Awakens* articulated its own production and spectatorship narrative, incorporating IMAX cameras and theaters as part of its rhetoric of nostalgia.

To be clear, the perceived clear divide between analog and digital filmmaking, or the notion of one being more “real” than the other, is based on specious and arbitrary distinctions. *The Force Awakens* used all manner of digital effects, and was released in every digital format available, including Digital 2D, Digital 3D, IMAX 3D (Digital), and the motion-seat D-Box system. And yet, advertising for *The Force Awakens* was careful to emphasize the use of 35mm and IMAX film cameras, as well as practical effects such as models, miniatures, and other non-digital techniques, and to ensure that audiences were aware of the option of seeing IMAX film prints. For example, a behind-the-scenes video prepared for the 2015 San Diego Comic-Con emphasizes the similarities between *The Force Awakens* and the original trilogy on the basis of a pre-digital materiality.<sup>20</sup>

The video is narrated by Mark Hamill and begins with a series of rack-focus shots, each starting with a clapboard, then suddenly shifting focus to reveal evocative sets and props, such as the *Millennium Falcon*, R2-D2, and stormtrooper helmets. These are followed by images of conceptual paintings, models, and puppets, whereupon Hamill’s commentary explains, “Real sets, practical effects: you’ve been here, but you don’t know this story. Nothing’s changed, really. I mean, everything’s changed, but nothing’s changed.” Over shots of studio sets, Lupita Nyong’o wearing her motion-capture rig, and Anthony Daniels in costume as C-3PO, Hamill’s voice continues “To see

18 The best-known objection to smaller IMAX facilities is: Aziz Ansari, “REBLOG THE FUCK OUT OF THIS,” *Aziz Ansari*, May 12, 2009, accessed May 15, 2017, <http://azizisbored.tumblr.com/post/106587114>.

19 For further explication of Nolan’s use of IMAX, see Allison Whitney, “Cinephilia Writ Large: IMAX in Christopher Nolan’s *The Dark Knight* and *The Dark Knight Rises*,” in *The Cinema of Christopher Nolan: Imagining the Impossible*, eds. Jacqueline Furby and Stuart Joy (New York: Columbia University Press, 2015), 31–43.

20 “Star Wars: The Force Awakens—Comic-Con 2015 Reel,” *StarWars.com*, 2015, accessed February 12, 2017, <http://www.starwars.com/video/star-wars-the-force-awakens-comic-con-2015-reel>.

how the technology has evolved, and yet, keeping one foot in the pre-digital world”—that final phrase over an image of a film camera, opened so we can see and hear the film running through its gears. Several more film cameras appear throughout the video, including an IMAX rig mounted on the cockpit of the *Millennium Falcon*.

This video cultivates excitement about the upcoming film in large part by making the case that it will adhere to filmmaking techniques whose roots are in the 1970s, framing viewers' nostalgia in explicitly technological terms. Indeed, the rack focus technique is one of several formal strategies, along with lens flares and handheld cameras, that became popular in the 1970s as a means of drawing attention to the apparatus of filmmaking. Julie Turnock has argued that these strategies, and their photographic artifacts, have been cultivated for decades in the special effects traditions of Industrial Light and Magic as a means of communicating notions of realism and authenticity.<sup>21</sup> In contemporary cinema they are often used as a counterpoint to the perceived artificiality of CGI, and J.J. Abrams has come to use lens flares with such regularity that they are something of an authorial signature, even to the point of becoming a joke among fans.

Given the promotional campaign's clear alignment of film with Star Wars's emotional essence, we might read *The Force Awakens*'s IMAX sequence as a spectacle framed by technological nostalgia. Audiences who saw the film in IMAX theatres (whether 15/70 or Digital) would be able to discern the native-IMAX footage because of a change in aspect ratio. As the sequence begins, Rey and Finn run toward a quad-jumper to escape the First Order, and Finn points off-screen to another ship, which Rey dismisses as “garbage.” When their intended ship is destroyed, she announces “the garbage will do” and the camera turns to reveal the *Millennium Falcon*—the first beloved icon from the original trilogy to appear in *The Force Awakens*.<sup>22</sup> As they run inside the ship, its presentation in IMAX forces the viewer to contemplate this emotionally loaded space in new terms. Indeed, the higher resolution of IMAX film and the difference in aspect ratio encourage the kind of attention to detail that audiences had experienced with the IMAX version of *Attack of the Clones*—one feels invited to look around “inside” the *Falcon* in a way that its earlier representations did not.

21 Julie Turnock, “The ILM Version: Recent Digital Effects and the Aesthetics of 1970s Cinematography,” *Film History* 24, no. 2 (2012): 162.

22 By this point in the film, we have seen familiar technologies, such as the crashed Star Destroyer, and the ruined AT-AT where Rey has built her house. Unlike the *Falcon*, however, these are more generic relics of the Empire.

The combination of familiarity and novelty that is integral to the Star Wars experience comes across in a sequence that quite literally brings life to old machines: not only the *Falcon*, but also the pre-digital film camera that reanimates it. Rey and Finn are not only under siege from the First Order, but they must also contend with the *Falcon*'s antiquated equipment: Rey barely gets the ship off the ground and Finn struggles to operate its ill-maintained weapons. Rey chooses the unlikely but visually thrilling strategy of flying the *Falcon* inside a ruined Star Destroyer, a spacecraft whose form has become a kind of shorthand in Star Wars iconography for the cinema's capacity to enact dramas of scale, to transform the function of the frame, and to offer ever more moving spectacles. The IMAX sequence uses the combined powers of 15/70 film, practical effects, and cutting-edge digital tools to activate viewers' nostalgia for the cinema of the past; then, this dynamic is mapped onto a spectacle in which the characters resurrect discarded machines, revisit the archaeological ruins of bygone wars, and ultimately unite their respective hero's quests.

While *Special Effects*, *Attack of the Clones*, and *The Force Awakens* employ IMAX technology in distinct ways, they each reward audiences' familiarity with Star Wars as a story, an iconographic system, and a cultural phenomenon, as well as encourage audiences to contemplate how different media formats inform the franchise's transmedia manifestations. IMAX iterations of Star Wars use the format's extreme properties of scale, sensory engagement, and image quality to immerse the viewer in the films' visceral and emotional pleasures, while also drawing their attention to the interplay of technology, nostalgia, and collective experience that sustains Star Wars as a cultural force.

## 19. Fandom Edits

### *Rogue One* and the New Star Wars

Gerry Canavan

For the first 35 years of its existence, the Star Wars franchise was branded as the inspired vision of a single auteur-genius, George Lucas, who controlled the franchise both creatively and economically. Among its major competitors in science fiction and fantasy, perhaps only Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* has been so closely identified with the mind of one person—and where Tolkien had his *legendarium*, the mythopoeic totality of the Middle-earth narrative, Lucas had his *saga*. In interviews, Lucas typically spoke of the Star Wars saga as a unitary megatext from which the first movie just happened to draw somewhere in the middle.<sup>1</sup> Lucas's self-conscious promotion of Star Wars as a modern myth—intensified by his frequent references to Joseph Campbell's study of mythic narrative, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*—presented the narrative as emerging from a coherent “master plan” Lucas developed in the 1970s and that has slowly unfurled ever since. Borrowing from Foucault the concept of the episteme—that “strategic apparatus” within a discourse that allows “a field of scientificity” to determine what is thinkable and unthinkable within that system<sup>2</sup>—we might say that Star Wars had, until recently, treated Lucas's authorial vision as the “one episteme that defines the conditions of possibility of all knowledge.”<sup>3</sup> In this chapter, I discuss *Rogue One* in the context of the 2012 sale of the Star Wars franchise to Disney, which functions as a moment of epistemic break for the Star Wars franchise. While Star Wars remains Star Wars both before and after this moment, our relationship to it as a system of knowledge is entirely different; indeed, in this strange early moment of transition between one episteme and the next, we might even say the current Star Wars episteme finds itself in a period of civil war.

1 Both the Tolkien legendarium and the Star Wars saga share this sort of bleed between text and archival paratext as well; in both cases, much of the “full story” exists only in interviews, letters, and author's notes, to the extent that it exists in any fixed form at all.

2 Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 197.

3 Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 168.

## Lucasfilm Minus Lucas

Either as corporate brand or as episteme, any proposed coequality between Lucas and the franchise already ignores key elements of the franchise's development since 1977. First, it brackets Lucas's own frequent changes and reformations of what the terms of that supposed master plan originally entailed. It likewise diminishes the importance of Lucas's many creative collaborators on the original trilogy, including editor Marcia Lucas (his ex-wife), screenwriters Lawrence Kasdan and Leigh Brackett, and directors Irvin Kershner and Richard Marquand, whose contributions to the Star Wars saga were recoded as marginal or incidental within the logic of the mythopoeic saga episteme.

That idea of Star Wars as a saga authored by a single creative genius becomes even more untenable when considering the EU of transmedia expansions. I am hardly the first to note that Star Wars only properly became science fiction, as opposed to space fantasy or even space fairy tale, within the more nuanced EU material, which took the comparatively juvenile films as building blocks to sketch out a larger and much more complicated galactic world-system.<sup>4</sup> In interviews, Lucas himself has always recognized the existence of these competing EU texts as a genuine challenge to his narrative authority, albeit one he did not ultimately accept:

*Starlog*: The Star Wars Universe is so large and diverse. Do you ever find yourself confused by the subsidiary material that's in the novels, comics, and other offshoots?

*Lucas*: I don't read that stuff. I haven't read any of the novels. I don't know anything about that world. That's a different world than my world. But I do try to keep it consistent. The way I do it now is they have a Star Wars Encyclopedia. So if I come up with a name or something else, I look it up and see if it has already been used. When I said [other people] could make their own Star Wars stories, we decided that, like Star Trek, we would have two universes: My universe and then this other one. They try to make their universe as consistent with mine as possible, but obviously they get enthusiastic and want to go off in other directions.<sup>5</sup>

4 I develop this argument in more detail in an article forthcoming in *Extrapolation*: "Hokey Religions: Star Wars and Star Trek in the Age of Reboots."

5 Ian Spelling, "New Hopes," *Starlog* 337 (August 2005): 46-48.

With the eventual release of the special editions and mixed critical reception of the prequels, the authority of Lucas's vision began to face an even more dangerous challenge: the rebellion of the saga's most-devoted fans. A cottage industry of post- and anti-Lucas reconceptualizations of the Star Wars franchise emerged: bootleg "despecialized" editions of the original trilogy that remove Lucas's changes have circulated on the internet as the "proper" way to view the film, as have various edits of the prequels that remove their supposedly problematic content (including the so-called *Phantom Edit*, cutting eighteen minutes of *The Phantom Menace*) and actor Topher Grace's re-edit of the prequels into a single 85-minute feature. The widely circulated Machete Order fan practice does *The Phantom Edit* one better, proposing that future viewers ought to ignore Lucas's pretensions to mythopoeic unity and screen the films in the order IV, V, II, III, VI, VII (omitting I entirely).<sup>6</sup> Circulating mostly via memes and forum posts, the now well-known Darth Jar Jar theory—which attempts to make sense of the unhappy foregrounding and subsequent unceremonious backbenching of the controversial CGI character by proposing that he is actually the secret evil mastermind behind the rise of the Empire—is only the most popular of a large number of fan rewrites, reconceptualizations, and "head canons" that have sought to improve the prequels.<sup>7</sup> Most widespread among fans, though, is the ultimate fan edit: a running joke wherein fans of the franchise collectively agree to pretend among themselves that the prequels never happened.<sup>8</sup>

Still, it cannot be denied that Lucas provided the epistemological grounding for Star Wars in the first decades of its existence. In its so-called Jedi Holocron, a database containing tens of thousands of entries detailing all known persons, places, technologies, and events within the Star Wars universe, Lucasfilm developed an internal hierarchy of knowledge—eventually adopted by fans as well—that formally prioritized the original films and proclamations of Lucas, followed by various devalued levels of secondary canon. With the sale to Disney in 2012 and Lucas's formal removal as the creative figurehead of the Star Wars project, a sort of epistemic crisis has emerged for the franchise. Now the saga has continued into a new trilogy

6 *Rogue One*, discussed below, poses an interesting problem for the Machete Order viewer. Should *Rogue One*, as "Episode 3.5," be watched before *A New Hope*? After? After *The Force Awakens*? Should it be watched at all?

7 *Darth Jar Jar*, accessed May 15, 2017, <http://darthjarjar.com>.

8 In parallel, many older fans of the franchise have become prickly even on the question of the proper name for the original Star Wars film, many now refusing the *A New Hope* retitling as a gesture that refuses Lucas's authority as sovereign (re-)writer.



without Lucas's supposedly unitary vision and also expanded into the anthology films that will tell new stories that likewise fall outside the scope of Lucas's mythopoeia. These films will be accompanied by a new set of transmedia tie-ins, replacing the old EU, which has been relegated to the status of Star Wars Legends. With this new, clean slate, Disney's plan is for transmedia licensed works such as comics, books, toys, and video games to be henceforth developed in tight internal consistency, eliminating any need for internal divisions of canon. In the post-Lucas Star Wars there will thus be more and more texts competing for the top level of authority, as well as more writers, directors, set designers, costumers, tie-in novelists and comics artists, toy designers, corporate hacks, etc. all speaking with equal authority about Star Wars—none of whom possess the same sort of obvious sovereignty over the franchise once held by Lucas and the original films.

Disney's ambitious multi-decade plans for the anthology films—"You Won't Live to See the Final Star Wars Movie," as *Wired* memorably put it—will soon swamp the Lucas-inspired saga films centered on the drama of the Skywalker family, ostensibly in favor of a larger Star Wars universe in which other sorts of stories about other sorts of characters might be told. Of course, given the extremely poor reception of the prequels, the decentering of Lucas has generally been taken as good news for the health of the franchise. Still, the external shift in the political economy of the Star Wars franchise takes on a challenging epistemological character with regard to the internal continuity of the shared universe. Where once the process of adjudicating the canonicity of a given fact was in some sense automatic—is it in the movies? did George say it?—it now requires more complex considerations among a much larger series of competing texts and authors that will inevitably come into conflict with one another.

What's more, without even the fiction of a Lucas-authored master plan licensing its creative ambition, Disney cannot help but admit that they are simply making things up as they go along, thereby weakening fan confidence that the sequel trilogy and post-saga anthology material will ultimately cohere to the extent the original trilogy did. J.J. Abrams famously announced in interviews around the release of *The Force Awakens* that he did not work on the next two episodes at all, saying he was leaving them in the capable hands of Rian Johnson (who announced in interviews that he did not work on the untitled Episode IX). All the Disney-era saga films have had extensive periods of rewriting and reshooting, sometimes leading to significant delays in production, as with the six-month delay in the release of *The Last Jedi* and the shock firing of directors Phil Lord and Chris Miller from *Han Solo* in favor of Ron Howard midway through production. Disney

has also conceded that, following the unexpected death of Carrie Fisher in December 2016, it has simply had to “start over” with *Episode IX* entirely.<sup>9</sup> These twists and turns are strongly at odds with the more mythopoeic idea of Star Wars. Furthermore, Disney cannot help but fuel fan speculation about the contingencies and competing creative visions that influence a finished product, as well as further encourage fans to create their own competing canons and visions for the franchise. In what follows, I propose that *Rogue One* offers an opportunity for us to check in on the formation of this new, unmoored episteme of the Star Wars franchise in the moment that it is still taking shape; for the moment, after all, *Rogue One* is still the rogue one—the outlying exception that will soon become the rule.

### *Rogue One*: Defining the Anthology Film

As soon as *Rogue One* was announced, it began to fuel speculation as to what a non-saga Star Wars film would look like. Would it begin with the familiar fanfare and opening crawl? Would there be the familiar early shot of a starfield, quickly panning away to a spaceship? Would it use the wipes between scenes that the classic and prequel movies did? Would it use music from the original trilogy? Would it use a John Williams-style orchestral score at all? Questions like these drive home the unusual nature of the anthology film project for the franchise by questioning what formal elements—what sights, sounds, paratexts, editing techniques—stamp a movie as truly a Star Wars film. Interviews with the production crew have made clear that formalist concerns around familial resemblance strongly occupied the studio during *Rogue One*’s production, at times swinging back and forth between possibilities. Fans likewise hotly debated the possibilities among themselves as they waited for news to trickle out. This period of anticipation set the pattern that emerged across *Rogue One*’s production and reception: Disney’s lack of sovereign control over the Star Wars episteme necessarily produces competing visions among fans who not only understand themselves more as co-creators than as passive receivers of the franchise, but who now possess the digital tools to easily create and distribute their own alternative visions of the franchise.

9 Esther Zuckerman, “Disney Started over on Star Wars: Episode IX after Carrie Fisher’s Death,” *The A.V. Club*, May 5, 2017, accessed May 15, 2017, <http://www.avclub.com/article/disney-started-over-star-wars-episode-ix-after-car-254835>.

In the end, *Rogue One* distanced itself formalistically from the Star Wars saga in a number of key ways: there is no opening fanfare or crawl, in favor of a cold open, and the film uses regular cuts as opposed to Lucas's famous wipes to move between scenes. The film also adds non-diegetic onscreen text to indicate on which planet each scene takes place, a new technique for the franchise. At the same time that it attempts to assert these kinds of minor formal differences, however, *Rogue One* takes pains to inject itself into the continuity of the original films, even to an extent that some might describe as painful, suturing itself to the old Star Wars saga even as it begins the process of ostensibly expanding and remaking it. The film draws its plot from the first line of the original opening crawl of *A New Hope*—"Rebel fighters, striking from a hidden base, have won their first victory over the evil Galactic Empire"—and contains frequent narrative and visual references to that movie, even ending on a CGI shot of the young Princess Leia set perhaps minutes before the first film begins. The film lovingly recreates that milieu in costumes, staging, and visual composition, even deploying previously unused footage of X-wing pilots from *A New Hope* to link the two films' background characters together (as well as including obtrusive cameos from R2-D2, C-3PO, Darth Vader, the two troublemakers from the Mos Eisley Cantina, and so on).

The flip side of this strict (even suffocating) devotion to the original Star Wars canon is that *Rogue One* presents itself as utterly disposable from the perspective of the Star Wars saga. Because every major character dies and every plot thread flows directly into *A New Hope*, without any excess, the film presents itself as emphatically optional from the perspective of the larger saga. Early fan assumptions that there would someday be a *Rogue Two*, or that characters from *Rogue One* would eventually appear in the saga films—based in part upon rumors that Felicity Jones had been contracted for at least two movies—proved unfounded; instead, *Rogue One* neatly dismantles itself, leaving behind no residue or storyworld mess. Marketed as the untold story behind the destruction of the Death Star, the film leaves the viewer with the impression that the story is untold within the Star Wars universe itself. Despite the direct participation of many of the principals from the original trilogy, none of its events are ever mentioned by the saga characters again, even in their immediate aftermath. *Rogue One's* commitment to its own self-sterilization in the service of canon hygiene is truly profound.

Contrary to the supposed expansion of the universe effected by the anthology films, then, *Rogue One* actually grants the saga films maximum priority. As more anthology films arrive, this paradox will only intensify,

eventually making the original totalized view of a mythic saga untenable while simultaneously reinforcing the importance of the saga films as the only possible common ground among a decentered and multiply authored megatext. Moreover, without the imprimatur of an acknowledged auteur granting it textual authority within the Star Wars episteme, *Rogue One* seems unable to sustain a single canonical interpretation even within its own limited terms. In practice, *Rogue One* has been marketed with a strategy that is nearly the opposite of the one used by the original Star Wars saga; that is, rather than adopting the pose of a singular mythopoeic vision, springing into existence fully formed, in its marketing for *Rogue One*, Disney instead highlighted *Rogue One*'s multi-author and highly contingent design process, including its rewritings, reshoots, excisions, and apocrypha. Where the original mode of Star Wars fandom was a kind of exegesis—unpacking a divine myth that came to us from on high, or from our collective unconscious, by way of Lucas's artistic vision—the new mode of Star Wars reception is instead a collaborative and negotiated co-creation, in which the fan is invited by the creators themselves to rewrite the movie and its place in the larger mythos in whatever terms they prefer.

The initial spark for fandom edits—and their unusual promotion by Disney—apparently occurred only by accident. The first teaser trailer for *Rogue One* was released on April 7, 2016 and featured a number of striking moments that never appear in the finished film; highly publicized reshoots later in the summer, as well as post-release interviews from the creative staff, indicate that the film was not yet in fixed form. After the film was released, the highly scrutinized trailer became the locus for investigation into that phantom originary version of the story. Fan news sites immediately produced lists of the major changes from the trailer to the finished film in an effort to produce a sense of what had been changed and to speculate about what the reasons might have been. The key change seems to be in the character of Jyn Erso (Felicity Jones), whose personality was evidently more hard-edged in the original vision of the film. The trailer presents her as something of a scoundrel (perhaps even a female variation on Han Solo) who has been drawn into the rebellion against type. A stern voice lists her rap sheet—"Forgery of imperial documents. Possession of stolen property. Aggravated assault. Resisting arrest"—while Mon Mothma talks about how reckless and undisciplined she is. Over scenes of violence, Erso retorts: "This is a rebellion, isn't it? I rebel." The trailer ends on a shot of Jyn in a TIE Fighter pilot's uniform under dialogue asking "What will you become?" further suggesting that the character will be in some sense fundamentally

untrustworthy, even perhaps that she might ultimately betray the Rebellion, or at least appear to do so.

The seeds that were planted here influenced interpretation of the later trailers, snowballing into a premediation of the film centered on Jyn that was strongly at odds with the finished film. Consequently, initial fan reception of the film returned to the trailer (especially the initial teaser) to discover that most of what was presented in that format was cut, including its most memorable images and dialogue. Jyn's character is not, as the trailers made it appear, a dangerous criminal brought in by a desperate Rebellion to do a dirty job; she is instead recruited to be a living letter of introduction that gains the Rebellion access to characters they might otherwise not be able to speak to. Likewise, nearly all of the dialogue portraying her as an anti-hero was gone, as was most of her roguish edge; or, as K.M. McFarland's analysis put it, "somewhere along the way Jyn-as-agitator got downgraded to Jyn-as-jaded-neutral-objector."<sup>10</sup> Without the fan expectations produced by the premediation of the trailers, Erso's personal motivations and backstory are fairly opaque, and her character therefore largely remains a cipher. Perhaps not incidentally, much of the initial fan analysis of the film has found itself nostalgic for the trailer, as opposed to appreciating the finished film—more attached to the premediation than to the thing itself.

The film's bleak ending similarly turns out to have multiple possibilities in the trailers, with characters appearing in locations during the final heist that would be impossible in the narrative as presented. In this difference between the trailer and the final film, the development of a new episteme in Star Wars is clear; while the facts of *Rogue One* are set (they all die), the explanation for the emergence of that set of facts becomes a contested site of speculation between text, paratext, creators, and fans. Who intervened, when, and why, to give us this *Rogue One*—as opposed to any one of its many possible alternatives? In the old Star Wars we could have simply said, for better or worse, "George did it"; in contrast, the new Star Wars produces multiple competing actors, each exerting force on the production, with no one faction definitively responsible for any one creative choice, or even appearing to have final authority.

Perhaps sensing this muted sense of fan dissatisfaction, Disney's post-release strategy has focused to an unusual extent on explaining how the film reached its finished form, as well as detailing other directions the

10 K.M. McFarland, "Let's Take a Second to Think about the *Rogue One* That Almost Was," *Wired*, December 20, 2016, accessed May 15, 2017, <https://www.wired.com/2016/12/rogue-one-discarded-dialogue>.

narrative might have taken. A lengthy interview with editors John Gilroy and Colin Goudie at Yahoo UK walked fans through the process of the reshoots,<sup>11</sup> while director Gareth Edwards's appearance on the podcast "The Director's Cut" explained his method of capturing material in a period of cinematic experimentation called an "Indie Hour": "It was just a way for the crew of understanding, for now, we're just going to do loads of random shit. Don't try to ask, we can't explain. It would just be things I thought were a beautiful moment or 'This is a great idea' and a lot of the stuff in the trailer ended up through that process."<sup>12</sup> "Random shit"—quite a change from the mythic, quasi-divine inspiration that ostensibly birthed the Old Star Wars!

Other interviews with the *Rogue One* production staff further suggested the fraught process of conceptualizing the film even while it was being shot, including the last-minute addition of the climactic Darth Vader massacre at the very end of the film, which was added in at the last possible moment. The headline of a piece by Andrew Liptak at *The Verge* suggests the somewhat dangerous PR strategy here: "*Rogue One's* reshoots show how Disney saved the first standalone Star Wars movie."<sup>13</sup> *Rogue One* was emphatically not, we are told, an inspired work of genius appearing fully formed within the mind of its creator; rather, it was nearly a disaster, something that had to be salvaged at the last minute. The inevitable implication is that other versions of the film might well have been better (or much worse) and that future entries in the franchise will likewise vary widely in planning, execution, tone, and overall quality. Unable to control the episteme of Star Wars with the authority Lucas once wielded and unable to microtarget global blockbusters to suit the interests and desires of every possible fan demographic, Disney's unique strategy with *Rogue One* has been to gesture to paratexts outside the final print and thereby invite Star Wars fans to remix and misremember the film in ways they find more pleasing. Very much by design, there is now many more than just one *Rogue One*.

The key exception to this marketing strategy has been in the DVD and Blu-Ray releases, which contain little deleted material despite its

11 Tom Butler, "Rogue One's Editors Reveal the Scenes Added in the Star Wars Standalone Reshoots (Exclusive)," *Yahoo UK*, January 3, 2017, accessed May 15, 2017, <https://uk.movies.yahoo.com/rogue-ones-editors-reveal-scenes-added-in-the-star-wars-standalone-reshoots-exclusive-110124381.html>.

12 Qtd. in *The Director's Cut* 52, <https://soundcloud.com/thedirectorscut/episode-53-rogue-one-a-star-wars-story-with-gareth-edwards-and-chris-miller>.

13 Andrew Liptak, "*Rogue One's* reshoots show how Disney saved the first standalone Star Wars movie," *The Verge*, January 15, 2017, accessed May 15, 2017, <https://www.theverge.com/2017/1/15/14268850/star-wars-rogue-one-reshoots-disney-gareth-edwards-tony-gilroy>.

importance to the film's post-release promotion. Disney has claimed, to fan frustration, that the material does not exist in sufficiently fixed form to be distributed as extras. "The stuff people talk about, like what they saw in the trailer, they're not scenes you can just put on a DVD," Gareth Edwards told Fandango in an interview.

They're moments within scenes and threads, and you pull a thread and it all changes. It was changing the whole time. It's not like there was one version and then there was this other version—it was like this thing that incrementally evolved constantly through all of post-production and didn't stop until there was a gun at our heads and we were forced to release the movie.<sup>14</sup>

Disney's marketing strategy for *Rogue One* thus rests on a core paradox: *Rogue One* exists in multiple forms for the purposes of fan identification and critical interpretation, while still only ever existing in a single fixed form.

The contradiction between Disney's proliferation of paratextual alternate versions of *Rogue One*—even above and beyond what it can actually commoditize as salable product, and outside the filmic canon the corporation will commit itself to respecting in future outings—and its simultaneous insistence on the primacy of its final cut registers the final breakdown of the old Star Wars episteme. There, everything rotated around a core of movies—first three, then six—mythopoeically authored by George Lucas, on which the tie-in products commented but with which they did not really compete. If *Rogue One* is the model, the new Star Wars will be something quite different: now without a single privileged author and without any core text, every entry in the franchise will reproduce and intensify this tension between endlessly personalizable fan customization and flattened-out mass-audience appeal. In the anthology era, Disney will need to sell each Star Wars fan the version of each "Star Wars Story" they most prefer, all without taking the risk of alienating any other market or constraining the possibilities for maximum profit-seeking further down the line. *Rogue One*'s middling success—fun enough, but formulaic, and instantly forgettable—suggests this will be a very difficult balancing act to pull off, much less iterate over and over again in a new Star Wars film every year for the rest of our lives.

14 Qtd. in Germain Lussier, "There's Something Weird About This Explanation for Why You Can't Watch *Rogue One*'s Deleted Scenes," *iO9*, March 14, 2017, accessed May 15, 2017, <http://io9.gizmodo.com/theres-something-weird-about-this-explanation-for-why-y-1793264866>.



## The Keepers of the Whills

Several years ago, Cory Doctorow made an interesting observation about fandom over the course of an email interview with one of my classes. Speaking about the “custodial” and intensively protective relationship that fans of Disney seem to have with the theme parks, Doctorow noted competing impulses within the Disney corporation. Over the years, the strategy has been to simultaneously inculcate this sort of fierce loyalty *and* to interrupt it, so that the “social contract” between fans and the corporation always “becomes a commercial relationship again,” with The Disney Company’s monetary interests indisputably at the head. For Doctorow, this tension recalled a plot from the 1992 Greg Egan novel *Quarantine*, in which people whose brains have been altered by a sinister conspiracy in order to ensure perfect loyalty ultimately overthrow the conspiracy’s dark masters, on the grounds that only those with altered brains can be truly loyal to the conspiracy:

I always thought that was a really interesting little bit here, to say: who are you to say that you’re the true keeper of the flame? Maybe I’m the true keeper of the flame. You’re just a corporation who’s in it to make as much money as you can from these assets. And maybe that converges sometimes with being the best custodian, and maybe sometimes it doesn’t; maybe sometimes you’ll go off and chase the quarterly profits at the expense of long-term value. Meanwhile, I have no commercial interest in it—therefore I’m a better custodian than you, I should have more say in it that you do. And I think that relationship beats in the heart of big Disney fans, the people you see who know the park like the back of their hand.<sup>15</sup>

In the context of Star Wars, of course, the more precise term would not be “flame” but “Whills.” From his earliest drafts, Lucas imagined the Guardians of the Whills as a monastic order devoted to chronicling the history of the galaxy; he even described the Star Wars movies as a narrative told by R2-D2 to some “Keeper of the Whills” a hundred years or more after the events of the original trilogy. The Guardians of the Whills—long a saga paratext with canonical, Lucas-backed authority despite never appearing on

15 “Trying to Predict the Present: An Interview with Cory Doctorow,” *Gerry Canavan*, Spring 2010, accessed May 15, 2017, <http://gerrycanavan.wordpress.com/2015/04/08/from-the-archives-interview-with-cory-doctorow-on-disney-sf-violence-meritocracy-goodharts-law-fandom-and-utopia>.



screen—finally became canon in *Rogue One* in the characters Baze Malbus and Chirrut Imwe, non-Jedi who exhibit a religious devotion to the Force and even seem to have some access to its powers.

The reemergence of the Keeper of the Whills from the primordial Star Wars mythos into the post-Lucas Star Wars era provides an interesting figure for the task of managing the Star Wars episteme in its Disney era. The figure of the Keeper of the Whills suggests a history that is simultaneously authoritative and constructed—objective but perspectival, obsessively detailed but not total or complete. It foregrounds precisely the epistemic grounding that Star Wars now faces: a history that is neither authoritative nor authored but rather partial, polyvocal, and negotiated among multiple competing actors with sharply divided interests.<sup>16</sup>

It cannot be coincidence that, in the recent *Aftermath: Empire's End* novel, we see a glimpse of the holy writing of the Whills that points to the crisis of knowledge that comes to Star Wars after God (Lucas) is dead (or at least retired). Remixing the language from the foundational retcon of the Lucas era in Star Wars—the awkward moment in *Return of the Jedi* in which Obi-Wan comes close to conceding that everything he told Luke about his father in *A New Hope* was a lie—the Journal of the Whills proclaims: “The truth in our soul / Is that nothing is true. / The question of life / Is what then do we do? / The burden is ours / To penance, we hew. / The Force binds us all / From a certain point of view.”<sup>17</sup> The return to the Order of the Whills strikes me as a telling metaphor for the situation of Star Wars as a franchise in this moment of transformation: Disney has traded the epistemic certainty of the Lucas era for the post-authorial, post-mythopoeic multiplicity of the post-Lucas Star Wars. As an initial outing, *Rogue One* suggests this strategy will be financially lucrative, but creatively bankrupt—but this was only the Death Star's first test.

*My thanks to Dan Hassler-Forest and the Rogue One panel at ICFA 2017 for help in developing these thoughts.*

16 Leland Chee, developer of the original Lucasfilm continuity database, the Jedi Holocron, was dubbed “The Keeper of the Holocron” by Star Wars fans; fittingly, the Disney-era successor to the post (which includes Chee as one of many such “Keepers”) is the somewhat less audaciously named “Lucasfilm Story Group,” suggesting even more debate, disagreement, incompleteness, and uncertainty than even that provisional Keepership. The fan alternative is the collaborative, multi-authored Wookieepedia project.

17 Chuck Wendig, *Star Wars: Aftermath: Empire's End* (New York: Random House, 2017), 178.

# Afterword: “You’ll Find I’m Full of Surprises”

The Future of Star Wars

*Will Brooker and Dan Hassler-Forest*

*Dan Hassler-Forest: Will, you’ve been a lifelong Star Wars fan and you’ve published numerous books and articles on the franchise and its fan culture. Having invested so many years in Star Wars, where do you stand right now regarding the films in the Disney era? Have the new movies made you more or less of a fan?*

Will Brooker: The meanings of “being a fan” and of “Star Wars” (and therefore, of “being a Star Wars fan”) have changed so much during my lifetime that it’s hard to answer in terms of more or less. Between 1977 and 1983, to be a Star Wars fan at my age meant that you loved the world depicted in and suggested by three feature films: you saw them as often as you could in the cinema, bought all the toys that you could afford, played games based around the stories and characters of that world, maybe read the comic books and spin-off paperbacks, and pursued other assorted activities like taping the soundtrack from TV broadcast onto cassette.

Being a Star Wars fan now could involve a much broader and more diverse range of activities, around a much broader and more diverse range of texts: within the new Disney-authorized canon alone, there are eight official movies, various TV series; console, PC, and phone-based games; new comic books and novelizations; and, of course, new toys, costumes, and other merchandise. And this is just within the post-2014 canon. A Star Wars fan might have to specify that they also like the EU that was relegated to Legends status after the Disney takeover; that they pretend the prequel movies didn’t happen, and don’t include those in their own head-canon; that they prefer the retro texts like trading cards, comics, the *Holiday Special*, and the Ewok movies from the era of the original trilogy. And, of course, there are many more ways of engaging in fandom now: phone apps and online discussion boards weren’t available to me when I first encountered Star Wars, but neither were conventions, because of my age, and cosplay, although I did of course dress up in my own modest way at home.

So I don't think it's possible to measure a person's commitment across different periods of "Star Wars fandom," given the way all the words in that phrase have so radically changed; but I could give a rough sense of my relationship to the franchise.

As I've discussed in my own academic work, my first burst of Star Wars fandom was around the original trilogy, starting when I was seven years old; it faded when new films stopped being made, inevitably, but I would say I was still a fan at heart throughout the 1980s. I experienced a special rush when I played the arcade games or even the basic, bleepy home computer games based on Star Wars movies. So the Timothy Zahn books of the 1990s revived something that was only dormant in me, rather than dead. I really enjoyed that return to the world and the familiar characters, and bought a few games for the more sophisticated PCs I owned during that decade.

I started writing academically about Star Wars around 1995 (an early chapter in *Postmodern After-Images*, reprinted later with some framing remarks in *Liquid Metal*) and I was ready to be an enthusiastic fan of the prequels, but, while I tried—a review I wrote for *Scope* journal at the time is testament to that—I was, like many people, disappointed. My book *Using the Force* makes an effort to celebrate *Attack of the Clones* and I remember being relatively satisfied with *Revenge of the Sith*. But, in hindsight, I think they're simply not great films. I find it hard to even enjoy short clips of them now, although the online fan groups that have recently arisen around 'prequel memes' convincingly encourage an affectionate, ironic look back at those flawed movies.

So, that's where I was in the lead-up to *The Force Awakens*: wary, disillusioned, distanced. I deliberately avoided all trailers and production information, wanting to see the film unspoiled. I was pleasantly surprised by it, though, looking back, I do think it ticks easy boxes and treads a safe path. I was more impressed by *Rogue One* the following year, which I think did something more interesting and exciting with the dynamic between old and new. I saw that movie three times in a week, which is not something I usually do.

So I am not more of a fan of Star Wars now than I was between 1977 and 1983, or even in the remainder of the 1980s and 1990s. I am more of a fan of Star Wars than I was between 2005 and 2016, but I also recognize that it isn't being made entirely for me, and people like me, anymore. On the one hand, I feel I have a kind of authority as a long-term curator of Star Wars—someone who lived through it and cherished it for decades, as well as writing about it professionally—and on the other, I don't really know a lot about the details of the new Star Wars universe as it now stands, in

terms of the expanded worlds and history sketched out by all the spin-offs I now ignore. So I respect that there are other people, perhaps from younger generations, much more expert and also more enthusiastic than I am.

The neat thing, of course, is that Star Wars is all about legacy, and generations, and passing the torch, so it's quite easy to comfortably identify with the older characters of the saga, giving the kids their blessing. You can feel a connection with those fundamental themes even if you don't really feel you're deeply invested in the franchise any more: so Star Wars has an inherent, built-in role for the older people who lived through the old battles and now recognize that it's time to let others have a turn.

*DHF: One of the things that's changed recently is that George Lucas is no longer involved creatively. Instead, the new movies are the product of a collaboration between self-declared Star Wars fans like J.J. Abrams, Gareth Edwards, Rian Johnson, and the new cast members, together with veterans like Kathleen Kennedy, Lawrence Kasdan, and the surviving cast members. What do you think this will mean for the future of the franchise, and for its fan culture?*

WB: Given what Lucas did with the prequels, when he had a great deal of control, it would be a struggle for anyone to make worse movies. So I can't regret that the franchise is now, apparently, out of his hands. I've read speculation recently that his role may be still more significant than was imagined—that *The Force Awakens*, *The Last Jedi*, and plans for the anthology films actually follow Lucas's notes to a surprising extent—but I feel he's lost much of the creative talent he had. Perhaps he was always strongest at sketching out grand, mythical ideas, rather than writing dialogue and directing actors. So, if there is now genuinely a situation where other people are implementing the detail and doing the hands-on work, based on his broad strokes—as was the case with *The Empire Strikes Back*—that seems promising.

If the original creator has always shown a strong, steady hand on the helm throughout a franchise, then I can see there could be hesitancy about passing it on to anyone else. But that isn't the case here. I doubt the newer, younger generation of Star Wars fans cares whether Lucas is directly involved, and I expect many of the older generation feel like I do—though I did hear that there was an online current of resistance to Abrams, a strand of fandom which took a revisionist approach to the prequels and tried to argue that Lucas was the one with the true authorial integrity.

*DHF: Star Wars has always been a transmedia phenomenon, with peaks of activity surrounding the occasional film release. Now that Disney plans to*

*release a Star Wars film once a year, alongside a variety of TV shows and comic books, how do you think that will impact fan production? Is this a way for the franchise's owners to gain more control over the Star Wars storyworld?*

WB: I don't think more official texts limits fan production. Batman appears in multiple comic books every month and, of course, a variety of TV shows, movies, and games, and I don't think that incredible amount of official material has ever limited or controlled what fans do. If anything, I think the dynamic might be opposite and that fan activity tends to tail off when faced with a lack of canonical primary texts—compare Star Wars fandom now to 30 years ago, in the late 1980s. Equally, I don't think producers can control fan engagement by flooding the market. I would suggest that official texts actually help to prompt and encourage fan creation and, on one level, they provide the materials for bricolage, mash-ups, and other forms of pastiche.

A better example of producer control over fan activity was the official website's attempt to rein in and fence off unauthorized creativity, in the early 2000s; I believe there was a wave of cease and desist orders from Lucasfilm, coupled with an invitation to produce work within the boundaries of the official site, where, of course, that work would be restricted and controlled.

*DHF: The decision to update the films' representation of women and ethnic minorities in the recent films has created very different responses: on the one hand, what seems like a majority of fans who have strongly embraced the featured presence of female protagonists and more diverse cast members, while there have also been boycott campaigns accusing the films of "political correctness" and "white genocide." Does this point to a separation within Star Wars fandom—or perhaps even two separate kinds of Star Wars fandom—and if so, how would you relate it to the current political climate?*

WB: I would hope that we don't need to recognize racist Star Wars fans as a significant group. I wouldn't be surprised if the people who claim *The Force Awakens* and *Rogue One* embody "white genocide" are affiliated more with other, political groups, and have latched onto Star Wars as a particularly topical, high-profile platform. I also suspect that a proportion of those may be young, immature people who don't actually hold right-wing ideas, misguidedly trolling and trying to provoke a reaction, using these hashtags just to get attention and to feel part of a group: they are also "rebels," I suppose, but in a very stupid way.

I'm not trying to claim that Star Wars fans cannot be racist, of course, but I do feel these boycott campaigns are more about a general bigotry than

they are about feeling this specific franchise has betrayed them politically. Star Wars, to them, would (I think) be just one more example of a downward cultural slide.

Star Wars has always lent itself to diverse political readings. In the 1980s, it was associated with Reagan's Strategic Defense Initiative, of course, and with his views on the "Evil Empire" of Russia. The Original Trilogy and *Rogue One* are inherently about colonialism and terrorism, and can be read in a variety of ways in parallel to a range of real-world occupations and revolutions. So I think, in themselves, they are essentially about the same thing now as they always were in a political sense, which is not "everything and nothing" exactly, but a lot of things and thus nothing specific. The battle fought by Jyn and her comrades in 2017 is the same one that Luke, Han, and Leia pursued in 1977: Rebels against an Empire, an opposition that involves many cultural signifiers pointing in different directions. And of course, that is a sensible decision—the only commercial decision—when you're trying to market a blockbuster franchise to audiences around the world.

What changes, in a more fascinating and significant way, are the readings of that fictional political dynamic. The term "Resistance" began to circulate online in the early days of the Trump administration, linked to the currently vast and deep cultural affection for Carrie Fisher, who, of course, had recently died and, in turn, her role as leader of the Rebellion across five films of the Star Wars saga. The idea of a female-led resistance against America's current leadership and its policies clearly drew inspiration and iconography, at least superficially (in terms of placards and tweeted images) from Leia and Jyn. I don't think that is a meaning inherently in the primary texts, but it's a very interesting use of the films.

*DHF: The Marvel Cinematic Universe (now also owned by Disney) has become a media-industrial model for robust, commercially successful transmedia storyworlds. Its complex multi-platform, multi-phase organization was clearly inspired by Star Wars, but has now also provided a model for further commercial development of transmedia properties. Is this a model that you see Star Wars mimicking over the coming years? Or, if not, how do you think Star Wars will be different?*

WB: I don't see a great difference between the Marvel Cinematic Universe and the way the Star Wars Universe is now operating. I think Harry Potter is also going the same way and Universal is attempting something similar with the revival of its classic monsters. There may be less use of, and intersection

with, television than we're currently seeing with Marvel, but I can imagine the films cross-referencing each other and overlapping in similar ways.

One key difference is that the Star Wars universe was firmly established in cinema in 1977, whereas Marvel was able to create the terms of its cinematic world and characters far more recently; so Star Wars producers now are working in the gaps, within existing structures, and in that respect the task is more tricky—though with more of a nostalgic pay-off when it works.

*DHF: Nostalgia has always been central to the Star Wars experience, but, in the original films, this was a diffuse and somewhat undefined nostalgia for an older form of storytelling. Now, in the Disney-era Star Wars films, a lot of this nostalgic sensibility has been about recreating the experience of the earlier films (and their transmedia extensions). Is this a self-consuming nostalgia? To what extent is Star Wars a forward-looking franchise?*

WB: I think there's a complex dynamic here. Star Wars is inherently about the past, about legacy, inheritance, and the relationship—symbolic and literal—between fathers and sons (and now, belatedly, also about daughters). The original trilogy essentially explores Luke's relationship with Vader; whether he will follow his father's path or resist it, whether he will destroy Vader or save him. The prequel trilogy now functions as a long flashback—the fan-recommended Machete Order of viewing the films positions it this way—it's explicitly all about the past, and how things reached the point where we came in at the start of *A New Hope*.

As such, the end of *Revenge of the Sith* is the most rewarding part of the prequels for old-school fans like me because we finally see some meshing of the two in terms of character, plot, and design aesthetic: it satisfies because of our nostalgia for the originals. *Rogue One* is able to play up those pleasures to a much greater extent and, in a way, has a far easier task than *The Force Awakens* because of all the nods, cameos, and overlaps with the original that its place in the sequence enables it to introduce. That said, *The Force Awakens* also hooks deeply into original trilogy nostalgia wherever it can, sometimes subtly through visual and narrative echoes and sometimes directly, as with the reintroduction of Han Solo. The exchanges between Leia and Han incorporate a wistful, affectionate melancholy into the storyworld, echoing what fans are feeling.

As such, the films were always about looking back, and *The Force Awakens* ramps that up even more. But at the same time, I think there is a sense of forward dynamic. There is a new generation of young heroes, more culturally diverse than we saw in the older movies, in both the recent Star Wars



films. In *Rogue One*, of course, they all have to die, for the sake of continuity, but I think we can see it as a progressive step—literally progressive, as in “moving forward.” (There’s a complication here in that *Rogue One* is progressive about the past, rewriting history and suggesting that the Star Wars cast was always more diverse than we saw at the time.) I expect to see a shift away from the older characters in *The Last Jedi*, with Leia probably passing on somehow in *The Last Jedi* and a focus primarily on Rey and her companions by the (as-yet-untitled) Episode IX.

However, for that to happen, I think we will either have to retain Luke as fairly central in the story, and/or have Rey revealed as a member of one of the saga’s central families—because Star Wars has become essentially a family saga, a story about the Skywalkers, and I think the challenge is to move it along while retaining that focus. So, to answer the question, it functions like a family: it does progress and hand its inheritance down to a new generation, but it remains steeped in history, and I think it has always been about looking back, learning lessons from the past while adapting to a new period and its new challenges.

*DHF: So if Star Wars has developed primarily into a semi-mythical family saga, do you think Star Wars will remain in some way bound to the story of the Skywalker clan across the generations? Or do you think it will start branching out further within the central “authorized” storyworld?*

WB: Obviously, Star Wars will complete the nine-episode saga, as planned, which revolves firmly around the Skywalkers. The next anthology film, about Han Solo and Lando Calrissian, will not be about that family and has no obvious reason to include members of that family. If it excludes the Skywalkers entirely, it will immediately set a new precedent for the feature films, as both Leia and Vader had iconic cameos in *Rogue One*.

On the other hand, we could argue that Han is part of the extended Star Wars “family,” so his solo movie is an easy sell, even if it branches off from the Skywalker saga. Equally, a movie about Vader (between *Revenge of the Sith* and *Rogue One*) would essentially be about Anakin Skywalker, a Boba Fett movie would inevitably feature Vader, and a movie about Obi-Wan Kenobi’s exile on Tatooine would doubtless include the young Luke. So, in a way, you would have to take a huge step away from the familiar ground of the central saga to avoid all references to the Skywalkers. Han Solo movie aside, that would be a riskier prospect.

Games and novels have explored the distant past and the far future of the original trilogy’s world and the movie series could also, in theory, go that



route in future. I would suggest that a movie about previous Dark Lords of the Sith, or Luke's grandchildren, will be more difficult to pitch to a broad audience than it was to sell to the more niche fan-base of games and novels, so I'm not sure if I do anticipate such huge leaps forward and backwards in time, in the anthology movies.

I would expect to see side-narratives about what Han, Fett, Kenobi, and Vader were doing in the gaps of the original movies first and then perhaps the same types of solo movie about Poe Dameron, Finn, and other key members of the sequel cast, depending on how well the next episodes are received, and the extent to which those new characters continue to be embraced by fans. I could possibly envisage spin-offs from the prequels, about Darth Maul and Mace Windu, for instance, but I think those are more likely to be kept to television series rather than standalone feature films. I don't imagine we are going to get an anthology movie about Walrus Man (Ponda Baba) or the legendary Darth Plagueis the Wise, but I guess if they've exhausted all other options, the producers might have to explore those avenues to keep the franchise going in cinemas.

Star Wars has survived for 40 years, at the time of writing, including a sixteen-year gap—easily enough time for it to lose its fan base—between *Return of the Jedi* and *The Phantom Menace*. It has survived a prequel trilogy that was derided both by mainstream critics and by hardcore, long-term followers of the saga. It survived the loss of the entire EU, built up over decades and now relegated to “Legends limbo” and thereby officially outside canon. It now has fans who are too young to read and write, as well as middle-aged professors adding to the academic library of Star Wars scholarship. In the absence of official texts, Star Wars fandom—if my experience is anything to go by—lies dormant, rather than dying: like Han Solo in carbonite, it remains alive, and in perfect hibernation. But we now know that Star Wars is bigger than Abrams, bigger than Lucas, bigger even than Disney. It is a popular myth, passed on from one generation to another. It will do more than just survive: it will outlive us all.

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